

"PUNCHINELLO"

“P.UNCHINELLO”



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"Die Engel nennen es Himmelsfrieden,
Die Teufel nennen es Höllenqual,
Die Menschen nennen es Liebe."

To

ISABEL

INTRODUCTION

DESPITE, or perhaps by reason of accidents of stature and fortune, my luckless ancestor, Anthony Dallas, stands out in picturesque relief among the stolid figures that furnish our family annals. When as a child I first noted the old oil painting that represents a man with the figure of a dwarf and the head of a Titan, I was drawn to the face that stared out of the canvas with tired, miserable eyes, in which was written experience of a more generous lot of suffering than falls to the majority. When I learned that he had made a great name in music, and was also the hero of a romance of which none knew the rights, but which had undoubtedly more gained than lost by an imaginative transmission, my older years withdrew nothing from the first warm interest of my childhood.

For years my curiosity was somewhat starved, for the biography that circulates with other

dreary volumes of the kind—the same biography to which Dallas refers with such bitterness—holds nothing but the record of a genius who marched triumphant to success, and apparently breathed on inaccessible heights an air denied to meaner mortals. "Indifferent," runs the quaint old phrase, "to luxury, women and social life, Master Dallas spent his long life in arduous musical composition, finding sufficient reward in the rich appreciation of the artistic world." In the opening chapters there is a hint of an early romance that ended badly, and for the time threw a shadow over Master Dallas's life; "but," it runs, "he entirely surmounted the unhappy outcome of this youthful attachment, and found ample compensation for domestic joys in the full exercise of his art."

As I write this the picture is before me, and almost I could fancy that the delicate mouth twitches and the sombre eyes smile. Poor Anthony! His face haunts me with its piteous gaze of non-comprehension—so does a child look suffering an undeserved punishment. I would have sacrificed much leisure and patience to have unravelled the truth of the romance, which his own chronicler dismissed so curtly, and that has gradually drifted and dwindled

in careless mouths, till it has lost all claim to veracity, and is surmised by some to have been a low intrigue, by others a hopeless attachment to a lady of high degree; it has been bestial, it has been platonic, that romance, but always entirely subjective and dependent on the temperament of the *raconteur* for the form it took. Poor Anthony; he would have mocked with the best.

I discovered the truth by a most trivial accident. In one of the morning-rooms at Dane's End, where Dallas was born and lived the first part of his life, and where I have so far followed his lines, there is an old square table, riddled, I may say, with drawers, pigeon-holes, and manifold receptacles for papers. Here, goes the legend, Anthony was found dead with his head lying on his arms, and a manuscript scarcely dried before him. For the truth of this I cannot vouch—the statement has a picturesque completeness that wakes unkind criticism, but here in this table, hunting for a letter of my own, I pulled out a drawer and discovered that behind it was a false back, seemingly the end, in reality the beginning of another receptacle, and here, pushed far back, thick with dust and cobwebs, the yellowed

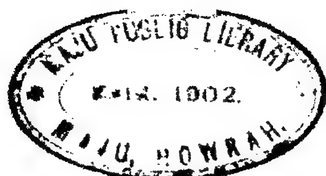
pages almost falling apart from stress of years, I found the truth of that romance.

"Punchinello" was scrawled across it in large defiant letters, but there were marks on it from the making of which both spiders and years could claim exemption. The pages were blistered with old scars of bitter tears. Poor Anthony—they made a quaint framing to the defiant "Punchinello" that filled the middle of the sheet. I opened the manuscript, and once under its influence, read and read, gathering every moment clues to the complex face on the canvas. It was not altogether a pleasant perusal, not touching by many lengths the exquisite tales furnished by the fervid imaginations of those who, strong in the knowledge of ancient lore, and pitying my curiosity, made me free of their most finished solutions of my difficulty. "A romance, of course! Anthony Dallas, your ancestor—somebody wrote his life—somebody said——" And then would flow forth, in irresponsible gay tones, travestied gorgeous readings of what by light of surer knowledge I can but term a pitiful tale. Unfinished, carelessly written, "eternally vapouring," as the author has it, the old MS. possesses for me an indefinable charm, with its sad telling of a life

that, apparently cursed by Fate, yet met shipwreck by the means that should have proved its salvation. Perhaps he frightened her overmuch for all his love. Poor little Nan! "If Anthony come to know." The pity of it that he did not. I should have preferred a more comfortable ending to this most unfortunate tale; but as poor Anthony himself would scoff, —the painted lips almost quiver with life and speech as I stare at him—There is always the biographer.

DOROTHY DALLAS.

DANE'S END,
CHILWAITHE.



I

LOOKING back to the early years of my life, it seems to me that my first consciousness was touched with the two great emotions—if I may so call them—which have so swayed my destiny. I cannot remember a time in which I was ignorant that a malign fate had laid evil fingers on me, and that I stood ostracized among happier children, or a time in which I was not determined to somehow cheat my ill fortune. This knowledge of something foreign in me made me vaguely unhappy in the period of white frocks and coloured ribbons long before definite words had given it expression: a smothered sigh, a stranger's stare, an expression of sympathy, which, child as I was, I noticed fell ever to my lot, and never to those children with whom I played—little trifles for which I ever endeavoured to account, though the reason of which I never, curiously enough, inquired. Along

with this nebulous sense of something wrong, there raged within me a ridiculous ambition. Even now, though I have lost the trick of laughter, I smile at the vastness of the castles that I built in those brave days—there was never pinnacle too vast for me to raise—and when I stood triumphant, having conquered worlds, I generously forgave those who had cast slights on me by their patronizing pity.

I must have been a singularly unobservant child, or possibly mirrors were purposely withheld from me, but I was seven years old before I knew the why and wherefore of this eternal compassion which I so resented.

It happened that one of our neighbours gave a children's masque. To add a fresh zest it had been decided that the tiny guests should each go in a fancy dress, illustrating as they would any period or character. Now this fancy, though I believe common enough in Town, had not penetrated to the country, and its freshness threw the neighbouring mothers into almost as hot a fever of anticipation as the children. The emulation was intense as to who should show the greatest originality in costume. I remember how we children spent long hours in puzzled endeavour at choice. Cecily had it

in her mind to go as Mary, Queen of Scots. She was ten years of age, and had the sweetness and roundness of a rosy apple. "I will go as Mary," I hear her now beseeching my mother, "and Reuben"—a little lad with whom we often played—"shall be my executioner, and carry my block behind me draped in black," she added enthusiastically; "it will be perfect." She went, I remember, as Phyllis, and Reuben as Corydon. They were the prettiest pair imaginable. But I digress overmuch. I weary telling my tale, as I foresaw, with manifold twistings and turnings. Now as the days passed I pestered my mother with eternal questions as to what character I should best present, but she ever avoided my question, looking at me with eyes full of fret.

"Art so anxious to go, my heart?" she asked me once. "Think of your mother lonely at home; will you not stay with her, my Tony?"

Now, although my intelligence lagged so in understanding my infirmity, I was a shrewd lad enough in other ways; and when my mother, who was ever keen to throw pleasures in my road, now suddenly put herself first, and begged me to refrain from a delight, the like of which

had never been known in Chilwaithe, to pleasure her fancy, I felt, child as I was, something of doubt.

"Not go?" I halted.

"But once," she pleaded; "and we will sit together, you and I—and I will read you tales of King Arthur."

She looked at me with her dear blue eyes again, and then she stooped and put her arms around me.

"My little lad," she said softly, and when she lifted her head I could see the sparkle of tears on the smooth velvet of my shoulder, and I wondered more than ever.

"Wouldst like to hear of Sir Galahad?" she coaxed cunningly,—for Sir Galahad was my favourite knight in all that gallant band,—"and Sir Lancelot? You shall sit up as late as the others, my Tony, and we will read together, and have a pleasant evening; is it not so?"

"No, no!" I broke short her words, half angry, half puzzled at this intent to defraud me of my pleasure, suspicious, child as I was, of some hidden reason for this unwillingness. "I would love to go as a soldier," I coaxed, pulling at her gown, "with a sword and a cocked hat of many feathers"; and when she made no reply,

I burst into tears, stung by the injustice that would cut me out of the coming delights which were making the days of the others bright with anticipation. It was just as I clung to her, and she turned away with her face working, that the door was flung open, and Joseph announced a Mistress Granby and her son.

Mistress Granby entered with an angry rustle of silk, her skirts standing stiffly round her and almost obscuring from view the lad who followed on her heels. She was a lady of generous proportions and good height, the latter augmented by the waving feathers in her bonnet, and she took full advantage of the facilities her amplitude afforded for purposes of bedizenment. Her fleshly body, I mind, burgeoned above a stiff stomacher glinting with glittering beads twisted in strange device. This feature of her attire is impressed on my memory; for having paid obeisance to my mother, she turned mumbling something of condolence regarding my pale looks, and enveloped me, regardless of my shrinking distaste, in a voluminous embrace, from which I emerged panting and smarting from an affectionate but ill-advised pressure.

I loved her not, and included her son in my distaste. It was almost as if—baby though I

was—some prescience that my calamity would come to me through these folk advised me to avoid their vicinity.

I shook myself free of her with scantest courtesy, and backed precipitately towards my mother, who frowned heavily, and yet sought my eyes with a glance pregnant of sympathy. She—I discovered as the years passed—shared my detestation of these grand neighbours, although it never reached the full vigour of my hatred. Having mannerlessly freed myself, I glowered at Mistress Granby, who regarded me with a somewhat obtuse benevolence.

Tardily just, I must acknowledge the excellence of her intention, and recognising the fact as clearly as I now do, I cannot understand why my memories of this lady should fill my mind with such harsh jarring. Some have it that kindly time, dulling a too critical remembrance, oft transforms quondam enmity to friendship or at least tolerance. It is an amiable fancy, but I cannot—speaking for myself and of such as have made me intimate of their private loves and hates—believe it true. There is no truer instinct than a child's; mine indeed never played me false. Where I loved, my heart still lies; where I hated, the sum has grown with the

accruing years. If there be aught of verity in words of holy men, you and I, Master Cosmo, will sometime settle a long account. But I diverge.

Indubitably on this occasion I treated Mistress Granby right scurvily, being a child spoiled and indulged beyond all reason. I was ever the first considered, and was allowed many little indulgences denied to Cecily. I played little with other children, and they—I know now—carefully warned beforehand, treated me as if I were of a finer clay than they boasted. I now understand that my mother—I had no father—had instituted a curious law of atonement, and was perpetually striving to compensate me by a flawless childhood for the griefs that life must inevitably hold in the future.

"Poor child," sighed Mistress Granby. She looked at me with the fishy eyes I abhorred, and swayed her head from side to side, till all the funereal plumes waved in desolate sympathy. "You bear these hot days well, Anthony."

"He is well enough," interposed my mother with a touch of acidity, as I instinctively turned towards the door. Dear heart! Now I know how truly my every hurt was hers. "Go into

the gardens, Tony, and take Cosmo with you. Go and see the foal," she added, arresting my flight.

I saw no other way of escaping from the drawing-room, and catching from my mother's voice a hint of her desire to be rid of me, I somewhat ungraciously stepped out of the long windows on to the lawn, followed by my guest. Perhaps it was the irritating consciousness of his superior strength and his fine limbs — I being but of a poor build, tiny for my years, and of an exceeding slow growth, which I steadily strove to accelerate by stolen watches in rain showers—or it may be Cosmo's slow, heavy complacency with himself and indifference to my claims when we met, which was but rarely. I incline to the latter theory, for he treated me with a scantily veiled contempt. Indeed, I know not truly the why and the wherefore, but this boy I could not endure.

Still, at first, on that eventful afternoon, we walked with apparent amicability through the gardens on our way to visit the new foal. For the moment I had forgotten the masque till he minded me of it with a boastful tale of his adornments. "I go as a courtier," quoth he, "of Louis XII.'s time—velvet knee-breeches, long coat, and silk stockings. Do not tell it

abroad," he simpered; "my mother thinks the effect will be the greater if none know beforehand. Very full the knee-breeches," he maundered, "lace ruffles over the hands." I confess I felt a little sick. We are told that vanity is a vice of the weaker sex; but, methinks, the wise king, when he confined a solemn warning to women against the wearing of vain apparel and the love of adornment, showed undue and unjust favouritism to man. I have seen old bucks of seventy, corseted, rouged and curled with an infinity of art that topped their years of two-score in daylight, and I have seen these same prepared for rest. It was ungallantly done of Solomon.

Now when he told me of these things my day clouded again, and I felt somewhat bitterly towards my mother because I had no tale with which to match his vaunt. I was sore put to it, for I could not bear that he should guess the truth, when an impish thought struck me and I smiled wisely.

"I keep my secret till the night," said I; and, not content with that, went on to tease him. "I have a careless tongue," I said regretfully. "I would you had not told me, Cosmo—not but what I will strive to keep silence."

Now Cosmo, for all his grace of limb and pink healthy face, was as stupid as a carp, and he fell headlong into my trap.

"Anthony, you would not!" he prayed; "gentlemen (oh, the air of him!) do not do these things."

"Slips of the tongue happen," I said sententiously. "Think not I would do it for malice," and I regarded him from the corner of my eye, wondering how far I might trade on that carp-like density.

It seemed I had somewhat miscalculated his thickheadedness, for he turned on me in sudden fury. "Malice—why, you are made of it! 'Tis a common trait of——" And then he halted, while the angry blood flooded his face.

Even now, had I forborne, I might have kept my happy ignorance a little longer, but I rushed to my doom. "A common trait—big words!" mocked I. "Art fallen short before the close of the phrase?"

He looked at me wickedly and smiled.

"I can make a fair guess at your dress," he grinned; "'twill suit you to the life—an excellent Punchinello!"

"Punchinello!" I said in honest amazement; "why Punchinello?"

"Come," he said, still with that curious smile, and he cut across the grass in the direction of the pond that glistened like a huge glass set in the earth. Against the long crowded years, with all their tumult and striving, that sleepy, summer noon stands out in curious relief. I turn my eyes inward and a mental picture is before me. The long lush grasses through which we stumbled, mercilessly crushing fragile bells o' Bethlehem, and startling grasshoppers into flight and whirr. The foal we had come to see, I mind, was shaking long, ridiculous legs in the next field. On our way we passed an apple-tree from which the rosy foam had not entirely drifted. From where we stood we could see the house veiled with ivy, and a turn of the gravelled drive sentinelled by flaunting tulips, that from the distance made the effect of a strip of gay ribbon winding to the door. The air was sweet with the scent of cabbage roses and mignonette, floating from the flower-beds we had left behind us. We hurried through the grass, I too breathless, in my endeavour to keep pace with him, to question till we came to the edge of the pond. It lay still and clear, throwing back faithful reflections of a willow that hung over it: I remember there

was a gigantic water-lily floating on it, resting placidly on its green leaves, with a gold heart bared to the blaze of sunshine, and hints of turquoise fringed it where the forget-me-nots lifted blue eyes. The whistle of a mavis in the distance made gay music. I remember it keenly.

Now when we had come to the edge, Cosmo beckoned to me to lean over. "Look at yourself," he said gleefully, "and understand why you shall be Punchinello."

I hesitated, thinking that in his malice he meditated precipitating me into the water. "Have no fear," he said again. "Stand thus!" He moved a few paces away from me and looked sideways into the water.

I followed his example, and the tranquil pond flashed back our images.

"Understand?" said he.

"No," said I, and pulled uneasily at the velvet blouse I wore, striving to straighten its clumsy folds. Despite my aversion to them, I always wore in those days full blouses and large lace collars instead of the trim coats I coveted.

"Pull harder," said he.

And I, poor baby, pulled harder with no result. "Now do you understand?" he asked

again. He came quickly to my side and drew my velvet blouse tightly over my back. " Punchinello," he said sweetly ; " indeed, an excellent Punchinello ! "

I cast a sharp glance over my shoulder, fearing I knew not what, and saw my shape outlined in pitiless distinctness. It was surely some passing ripple that lent that distorted outline to my back. My head too, sunk between my shoulders, loomed enormous in contrast to my meagre body ; but it was on the outline of my back that my eyes fastened—it was, if not a hump, the very surest indication. I put my hand behind me and strove to feel it through the folds and frills of my blouse.

It is my blouse," I faltered. My pride was gone, and to my shamed ears my voice sounded full of tears. " These clumsy folds ! " I plucked at them feverishly—I can feel the surface of that velvet now. " The blouse," I said again.

Cosmo laughed and shrugged his shoulders. " As you will," said he. I looked at him helplessly, fighting with the flood that was smarting in my eyes. " I have a weak back," I babbled again ; " I shall be stronger when I'm grown up."

"Grown up ! " he scoffed ; " such as you do not

grow. I"—he smiled complacently at his own image, bending over it enamoured, like a young Narcissus—"promise six feet, so they tell me."

A great knot rose in my throat and choked me: all the gracious world, that had been so fair a few moments before, swam blurred before my eyes. My voice sounded strangely when I strove to speak. "I will keep your secret," I gasped; "Cosmo, say it is not true!—Cosmo."

But his eyes were rivetted on the foal that he had just spied, and he was wearying of the subject. "What do words avail?" he yawned; "it is common talk, but I will lie an it please you, Punchinello!" And he ran towards the stile of the meadow, and left me gazing at the figure mirrored in the pond. Now, curious as it may seem, I had had no idea of my deformity. I knew indeed that I was not over-strong. I was for ever coddled and petted and made to rest unduly, and resented, as I said before, a clumsy compassion; but, having mixed little with other children, and those carefully chosen, I was in perfect ignorance of my shape. A mirror might have disillusioned me, but I had little vanity, and indeed I might have gazed by the hour at my own image and have detected nothing—it was only in profile that my cruel shape

showed. Even as I gazed into the water, with my blouse held firmly down with both hands, that my outline should be presented in all its hideous nakedness, I saw no hump, only a suggestion. I wondered, as I gazed, how much it would grow. To my excited eyes my deformity increased with the speeding moments. Punchinello! God could not be so cruel, I knew. I strove to comfort myself with sobbed asseverations of the Divine inability to promulgate so great a wrong; I looked up into the blazing blue overhead, half expecting the skies to open and a comforting negative to issue therefrom. I knew He would not—could not; but for all my certainty I sickened to have my convictions echoed by another.

My thoughts flew to that sweet presence—my mother. She would set all things right, and comfort me. We would laugh together at this brutal jest;—and for the future I would wear, I resolved, close-fitting coats, like other lads, instead of these slovenly blouses that cheated even ponds to such cruel semblance of deformity.

I forgot Mistress Granby in my distress, or more truly, remembered and did not care. I could hear Cosmo's laughter as he frolicked

with the foal. I heard him shout "Tony," but I did not wait, so anxious was I to hear from her dear lips the sweet, saving truth that I was as others. She would laugh at me, soothing my terrors with that tender ridicule with which she coaxed me out of my frequent fits of passion. I sped towards the house, fast as my legs could carry me, and struggled panting through the long window. Mistress Granby's voice was rasping the air as I entered.

"Mother," I said, heedless of her interrupted words; "mother." I clung to her gown with one hand, while with the other I sought my back. "Tell me—it is not true," I gasped, breathless with my running. "I am not Punchinello; it is not true. Cosmo says, mother——"

She spoke no words of denial, but drew me on to her knees.

"Take thy time, Tony," she said quietly. "What is it now?"

And so, with more or less lucidity, I stumbled through my tale, and still she kept silence, while now and again she pressed me closer to her.

Only Mistress Granby kept up a running accompaniment, "H'm, ha!" of surprise and re-

gret, as women will; but my mother signalled her to silence, and I told my story, which was indeed but short and took few moments in the telling, in peace. "Why did he say it?" I finished, and again her arms wound closer round me. "My little lad!" she whispered, and something wet and hot splashed on my hand.

At this moment Cosmo burst into the room.

"Why did you not come to me?" he said reproachfully. "I waited for——"

Methinks later he regretted that he had not waited longer, for at this moment an amazing departure occurred. My mother slipped me from her knee, and made two steps to where Cosmo stood. She seized him by the collar with one hand, the other glittered, be-ringed, for a moment in mid-air, and then descended, with a decision that rang through the room, on Master Cosmo's ears. I stared at her, fascinated. Another violent box. Had the last trump sounded, I should not have averted my eyes. Never before had I seen my mother angry. She was transformed in one moment from a Madonna to an avenging fury. Two splashes of pink burned on her white cheeks; her mild blue eyes shamed the diamonds on that punitory

hand. Another blow, and Mistress Granby, who, like myself, had sat open-mouthed and paralysed with amazement, interfered.

"He meant no harm; he is but a child," I heard her say; and she forced Cosmo from my mother's grasp. She let him go with a final shake.

"You *coward*!" she panted with heaving breast. "You reptile!"

My mother, my saintly mother, whom I had ever likened, in her pure stillness and whiteness, to the tall lilies of the Annunciation! My mother, on whose lips I had never heard a harsh word! My mother, who ever, by a tender twist of speech and voice, turned a reproof to kindest phrase!

"Go," she said, and turned her back on mother and son.

As the Granbys passed down the drive in mute acceptance of summary dismissal, I saw the Mistress cuff Cosmo again with a vigour that matched my mother's ardour, and something of the sweetness of satisfied animosity stole into my heart. But I was still unhappy, and my uneasiness was in no way allayed, for, after all, my mother had said no word. I looked at her in mute appeal, but her shoulder was

turned on me, and I knew nothing of what was written in her face.

"Mother," I said at last, "why did he taunt me thus? It is not true."

Then my mother turned and faced me with the old love-light in the eyes that had lately glittered so angrily.

"Come to my room, Tony," she said, taking me by the hand, "and we will have a little talk."

Now, above all things, I loved to sit alone with my mother in her own private chamber. At these times I was wont to make hideous havoc in her jewel-cases and wardrobes, thumb her books, all unreproved; and when tired of this, listen while she read aloud tales of the knights of old in which I so delighted. I would bring my violin, certain of a loving audience, and scrape my beloved airs, sure of applause, and she would smile, well pleased, and ask me if I would not love to be a musician, and write music that should move others as these writings of past giants moved me. And I would answer in the affirmative, truly enough being hungry for fame in any shape, but adding frequently as a rider that my first desire was to be a soldier in a scarlet coat and gold lace, and

win great battles. Here she would often sigh and kiss me suddenly, to my bewilderment, and fall back to talk of music. But this day, instead of leaving me free to choose my fancy to pass the hours, she made me sit on a chair close to her, and tucking her fingers under my chin to raise my face, she looked me squarely in the eyes.

"What is most needed in a man to make him a great soldier, my Tony?" she asked me.

"Bravery," I answered quickly, wondering somewhat at this beginning, for my mother till now had ever hated talk of soldiers, sports, and all such things, ever striving to turn my fancy towards the arts, and music, and more peaceful pursuits.

"You would love to be a brave man, really brave, of a courage that passed the common?" she said, with a catch in her breath.

I was getting desperately impatient; my tongue was trembling with unspoken questions as to the why and wherefore of Cosmo's cruel taunt and her sudden flare of anger. But there was that about her that day that filled me with something of awe, and I answered her mechanically, striving to understand wherein the difference lay.

"Indeed, yes! I will be of a great courage when I am a man, fight great battles, and wear——"

Then suddenly I remembered the children's masque.

"Mother," I began. But she checked me with soft fingers on my mouth, and spoke again with a tremor in her voice.

"Listen, Tony," she said, "and I will tell you a tale. Once upon a time a little child was born, ordained by God to bear something more of pain and sorrow than other children. At first he did not know, but one day a great coward"—she hesitated, and her pretty white hands fidgetted restlessly, and I thought of Cosmo, for all my trouble—"told him he was not as others. This child had always entertained, from his first understanding of life, great dreams of glory and valour. He would be a soldier, and fight his way to honour, and he loved to talk of trumpets and chargers, the brass of conquering bands, torn tatters of rescued standards. Later he understood"—the tension in her voice was piteous. "What did he do when he knew that he could never fight the battles he had chosen? Did he fight those of God's making? or did he turn his face to the

wall? What did he do, mine own?" Her arms were round me, her sweet, brave face with dimmed eyes was pressed to mine. "What did he do, my Tony? What will he do, my heart?" Her face was working and white.

And now—I write it with touch of shame for al the lapse of years—instead of comforting her, I dragged myself away from the loving clasp of her arms, and dashed myself on the ground.

"It is not true!" I sobbed. "It is a lie—a lie!" I shouted, striving to believe the falseness of my own assertion. "Mother! mother!" I pushed my wet face into the folds of her gown. "Mother, I am no Punchinello! I am straight! These thick velvet folds do the mischief." I tugged at my blouse. "Mother, I have no hump. I shall grow tall and strong—be a soldier, mother."

Still she did not speak, but lifted me from the floor on to her knees, and waited till my sobbing subsided for very dearth of breath.

"Be a man, sweetheart," she said at last; "do not fret that life can hold no battles for you; you will have enough to conquer, my poor laddie." Her kisses covered my face.

"If I must have a hump," I wailed, "and be

like old Martin in the village, I had rather be a daftie like him, and not understand."

"Hush, hush!" She quelled the torrent of my passion with a loving hand. "Dear, you have one gift by God's grace; let other things go by. Cleave to your music. It is not only by battles that men make undying names."

I lifted up my blurred face. "He called me Punchinello," I said.

"And what shall we call him?" said my mother, with a flash of the temper that had reddened Cosmo's ears. "There are worse names than Punchinello," and she muttered something beneath her breath that sat strangely on her Madonna mouth.

"I will not go to the masque," I faltered. "I understand."

And thus I learnt that by God's branding I was Punchinello.

II

IN my life, as it lies behind me, a gray, indeterminate sea, sharp crags of incident stand out, and on these I purpose to string my clumsy tale. The realization of my infirmity at seven years of age, the first crag, and from this I leap on ten years. I should, following my own desire, have written the history of this time, telling of a boy's fight with fate, and of a dear woman's loving aid. But I am old, and every day I feel my hold on life slacken. This knowledge would hasten the most dilatory hand; and again I want to write of Nancy. So I will skip these ten years, which indeed held nothing but a training in music from our organist; an ever-increasing solicitude concerning my health from my dear mother, and the breaking into womanhood of Cecily. From the day I learned from Cosmo's gibe how heavily God's hand had fallen on me, I developed something of an antagonistic attitude towards life and its pleasures. I had never been used to be

shy; indeed, with the vanity fostered by my mother, and my companions, who, carefully instructed, never jarred on my egoistic felicity, I was over-bold; but the bitter revelation of an afternoon changed me utterly. It was all I could do, I remember, having gained the key to the sympathetic environment that had so puzzled me, to face a stranger. That terrible excrescence between my shoulders grew, in fact, but slowly, though in my fevered imagination it took weekly distinctive shape and weight. I myself laboured to a pitiful height, some four feet ten inches, with heavy shoulders and massive sunken head. I could not spit a forgiveness at Cosmo in mine old age for his brutal veracity; but, nevertheless, I grant he named me truly. I am, indeed, a Punchinello.

I rest on my seventeenth year, for it was at this age an event occurred that was the cause of my leaving home for a period. I say the cause, because I left home owing to the episode; but I know that my mother had had it in her mind for some time to send me abroad, an ambition that I had fostered to the greatest extent of my ability. Thrown on myself for interest, and fearing companionship, I slaved unintermittently at my music, under Fritz

Ooterwint, organist of our church, who instructed me also in counterpoint and harmony. He was a kindly man, of a patience more common to moralists than musicians, and bore the sounds of his choirs with a fortitude that should have earned him a crown in the Golden Land of the future. While under his tuition I needly hardly say I composed love-songs, oratorios, symphonies, madrigals, and ballads. He would sigh sometimes as I thrummed in his ears the fruits of my fecund imagination, calling on him at short intervals to admire freely. I had a passion for the writing of anthems in those days, which in no wise interfered with a taste for lighter music. "Dear boy," he would say with his patient smile, dragging a red pencil ruthlessly the while through my most cherished combinations of notes, "let us have patience — be Palestrina, Beethoven, Handel, Bach, in turn, not all together. Your life is still to come," and then he would fling my MS. at my head; and I would catch it, smiling somewhat wryly, and go home across the fields to my mother, who ever praised and listened. Let us be true, my chronicle. I was a pitiful figure enough, God knows; yet I was a jackanapes of the first

water at that age, and as proud of my musical brayings and squeakings as other youths of their fine figures and courtly tongues.

It happened that one day I brought him an anthem of my writing, to which he accorded some of his rare praise; at which, for all my indifferent air, I was much delighted, for I knew Ooterwint, for all his queer sayings and eccentric doings, to be as full of music as an egg of meat, and when he grunted approbation, turning the leaves hurriedly, I grew hot with delight.

At this time my prime ambition was to hear something of my writing given in public, I suffering from no qualms as to its sufficiency of merit, and enjoying prematurely the savour of fame. Holding this a golden opportunity, I straightway prayed him to allow it to be rendered in our village church, which boasted in its choir two fine voices. The soprano was indeed a magnificent organ presented by some fantasy of fate to a woman as devoid of all understanding of the deeper meaning of music as any stone. Still she had a fair ear, and if sufficiently trained occasionally simulated some shadow of passion and emotion. The other voice was a baritone—invariably designated a

tenor by its owner. (I have never yet met a man who, except under compulsion, would acknowledge his voice a baritone; they are always tenors.) The remainder of the choir was composed of average voices, such as commonly form the body of their choir in country churches; but they were all taught with infinite care by Ooterwint, whose music was his life, and who proudly boasted that his choir stood among the best in the country parishes of all England. Although he did not negative my wish when first I told him of it, he laughed with a touch of bitterness.

"Dulcie Graham of course will take the first part," he said at last, and he whistled the melody of the opening phrase. "What words!" he said gently to himself; "and you have well matched the music. '*Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death, is strong as death*'—a fine crescendo—'*is strong as death.*' Let us pray Miss Dulcie may catch some understanding of the fact—'*Jealousy is cruel as the grave.*'—I'll lay you a wager, Anthony, she proclaims that with the most placid intonation—'*The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.*'—Here we have the man's voice. To

God we had a genuine tenor! Ah, good! good! —'*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.*' Now we have the body of the choir—'*If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.*' They will shout that grandly. It is indeed a fair truth. You have a happy suggestion of water here, '*Many waters cannot quench love.*' I have known a woman's tears go far towards drowning it, nevertheless," he muttered. "I like not these chords," he said, with a sudden dash of the old familiar pencil; "they are too thin. You must re-write this passage. But for the rest, it is excellent—most excellent. You have brought the very note of scorn into this phrase, '*If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned—utterly be contemned.*' You linger excellently." His sharp brown eyes twinkled as he looked on me. "Think much of love, Tony?"

And I, fool that I was, answered him in the fulness of my ignorance. "Love," I laughed. "I regard it as an argument upon which to hang my music."

He pulled my papers together, and pushed them towards me.

"You are a clever lad, Anthony," he said; "but there are things of which you are ignorant, in spite of your youth. However, in justice, I admit that love has made you an excellent argument. We will have your anthem when you will. Master Gregory, our baritone, casts, I am told, sheep's eyes at Miss Dulcie, who is not indifferent. Between the composer, who understands love in the abstract as an argument"—he smiled not unkindly—"and the exponents of the argument, who know its practice, we should have fine music, eh, Tony? '*Love is strong as death*,'" he mocked me openly. "'*If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be contemned*.' There must be something in it, Anthony—something strong, perhaps dangerous. A wise man has said of love, 'in life it doth much mischief.' He may have begun by using it as merely an argument." He locked the organ, and put his hand on my shoulder. "What say you, Tony?"

I laughed, and flung my glove at Fortune's feet, puzzling awhile over those chords at which he had taken exception. "I am not afraid. These things are not for hunchbacks. Give me satisfied ambition, an applauding crowd, the

substance of a man's house," I quoted irreverently, "and let them take their love."

"You are a fool, Master Anthony," he retorted civilly, and jangling the great keys in his pocket, went his way and left me staring.

III

AS I write these memories solely for my own pleasuring, I may linger as the fancy takes me, and indeed, if needful, I have a valid excuse to hand for this lengthy detailing of the story of my beloved anthem. It was thanks to this that I so soon found myself abroad. But even my own patience revolts at thought of recapitulating in detail my stormy endeavours, Miss Dulcie's impregnable calm, the nervous tremors of the baritone and choir, the chuckles and chortles of Ooterwint.

Enough to say that at last I felt the limit of excellence attainable by the choristers had been reached, and determined that my anthem should be heard on the following Sunday. Some hint of it had reached the neighbourhood, and there were not lacking folks who regarded the venture with dubiety; for although in every prayer book was clearly inscribed "in quires and places where they sing here followeth the anthem," an

anthem at that date in village churches was a rare if not an unknown interlude, and there were some who thought it savoured of popish practices.

I awoke on the morning of the eventful Sunday with a consciousness of the day holding great things, which I struggled to place in my drowsy sluggishness. Suddenly it leaped on me through the mists of my departing sleep—my anthem! I jumped from my bed, and hurried through my ablutions while the melody of the opening phrases sang sweetly through my splashings. I was ever a shade superstitious; and, looking from my window, rejoiced that the day augured so well. The gardens lay in a blaze of sunshine, and the dews, yet undried, turned the lawns to a white sparkle of diamonds. The stars of climbing clematis which struggled through my open casement were sweet with all the fragrance of newly-burst buds. It was one of those fair days on which it seems as if God rests loving hands on the world, saying that His work is good, and that all creation praises Him in a song of gladness. Beneath my window there was a flush of pink, where the heavy-headed roses wafted up their breath as incense; beyond them the white lilies bowed their pure

petals; here a patch of pansy-purpled ground, there an angry flare of scarlet geraniums. A wilderness of gilliflowers, sweet williams, and matted pinks cloyed the scented air; and, cleaving through the sweetness, came the whistling of blackbirds, and the songs of full-throated thrushes.

Fortunate environment lends to optimistic recognition, and I easily stifled my apprehension of the choir's possibilities, comforting myself, as I tied my cravat, with the remembrance of Dulcie's last rendering. She had caught either the infection of my enthusiasm or possibly the meaning of Solomon's words. I remembered that she and the baritone tarried in the dusky sweetness of summer nights, later than the proprieties allowed, and caught a clue to the understanding of this late emotion. "*Many waters cannot quench love.*" How triumphantly she had filled the church! Her golden notes had taken wings, filling the arches and floating forth this passionate word of a wise king, had gone through the opened, painted glasses of the windows, in comfort to the dead that lay without in the stillness of the churchyard. It was a glorious voice, and when vitalised held the desire of thousands of lovers

long since dry dust. I forgive her final fiasco for love of that last rehearsal. "*Neither can the floods drown it.*" Ooterwint had done his best. The sobbing accompaniment of that great avowal had sustained her. The choir had thundered it. A pitiful conceit; but I wondered, as I listened, that the shrouds and coffins around us did not burst asunder, and the dear dead rise with loving, outspread hands. "*Love is strong as death—as death.*" When she sang, it seemed indeed somewhat stronger, and the long-since dead burst their bonds, and the churchyard was peopled with a thundering throng. And all for walking with that immature baritone in the sweet stillness of summer lanes. At least, it was to that I ascribed the erotic rendering.

After breakfast we started together for the church, walking soberly; my mother, as was ever her habit at this time, silent, communing with God, if her eyes were aught of guide, and the tenderest smile playing round her sweet curved mouth as she marked me decapitating the wind-flowers and nodding bluebells in my fret.

Thanks to the anodyne ot time, I linger not ungratefully on this sad season. For months

after I could not bear the faintest reference to that day, but now I call to mind every trifle of our progress to the church that was to be the scene of my undoing. We went through the meadows, following the worn line of many feet, while beside us the gay green of the coming corn rustled and whispered in the morning breeze; on the hedges the convolvuli turned the sweet grace of their flushed faces to the skies. Before us, at short distance, the grey Norman tower of our village church stood stolidly. It was yet early for the congregation, but now and again a man or a woman passed us, and we saw them flit through the white tombstones and enter the church door. As we reached the entrance I was seized with a spasm of nervous terror, and would fain have stayed without. It rings conceitedly in the phrase, but to be candid, it was Dulcie I doubted, for all her sweet singing at that last rehearsal. In later years this calm complacency on the eve of a performance deserted me in some measure, but I had no terrors regarding myself in my boyhood, for such is surely seventeen, when it measures the years of a man; women I have known who counted but sixteen years of life. Cecily was but a year and two months my senior, but she had

the wisdom of the world at her finger-tips, and would often instruct me, saying, "You are but a boy, Tony," in tones that suggested a decade at least between our respective ages.

Now it had been arranged that Ooterwint should accompany my composition, and that I should sit in my mother's pew as usual, taking no part in the performance; so after having paid a hurried visit to Ooterwint, who met me with laughter and soothing words in the vestry, I returned to my mother's side. Never had the morning prayers seemed to me so interminable. I could have wept in the Psalms. David, no doubt, was an excellent man; he undeniably possessed the gift of language, but he is long, very long. I stood first on one foot, then on the other as the choir prattled through the vicissitudes of the sparrow upon the housetop. It is an unhappy comparison, intended no doubt to suggest forlornness, but trenching somewhat upon the absurd. By a malicious turn of fortune the lessons were long. I kicked the varnished seats and a worn hassock till I choked for the dust it held. I was in such a fever by the time I learned in my Prayer-book "in quires and places where they sing here followeth the anthem," that my mother lifted her head quicker

from her devotions than was her wont, being attracted by my fidgetings.

"Anthony," she said reprovingly, "Anthony," with a severe lingering on the second syllable.

"She will ruin it," I whispered for answer; "she will, I know she will!" But for all my anxiety I pulled myself together and adopted a devotional attitude, refraining from a furious kick that I was speeding on its way. At last we came to the Collect for Grace. The grand appeal, droned drowsily by our Vicar, sounded through the church; the bowed heads lifted to swell the Amen—a silence—then the prelude to my anthem.

I could hardly hear—my heart was hurrying so; the blood knocked furiously in my temples, overcoming the music, while chill shivers raced each other down my spine. As I recovered myself I grasped that Dulcie was singing the opening phrase. Now in my writing I had struggled, as is ever the way with young composers, to imitate a great man, and "il Sassone," as they termed Handel in Italy, was my god. It is well known that his music is essentially characterised by a softness and suavity borrowed from the Italian schools, and that he allowed it in great measure to counterbalance the German

element. Being young and ardent, I was, no doubt, *plus royaliste que le roi*, and followed Corelli with even more enthusiasm than my leader. It is sufficient to say that my music was essentially emotional, so much so as to border on the sensuous, and depended immensely on its exponents. By this I mean that, ignorant as I was of form, my anthem was little more than a series of melodies; and melody, as the merest tyro knows, is irretrievably marred by an unsympathetic rendering. Now Dulcie was rendering it in a tone that combined sarcasm and contempt, and hurrying the time cruelly. The organ panted onward, and I listened, fighting for calm. Her carelessness increased; she sang falsely, falling flat with cheerfullest complacency. "*Love is strong as death*," she chirped gaily, with a strong note of interrogation in her voice, and a bitter glance at the baritone. "*Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.*" His voice now joined her. I had written the most exquisite canon here, and they stumbled through it together, she petulantly and he sullenly. I restrained myself with difficulty, while my mother watched me nervously, and Cecily

giggled. The choir burst in and assuaged me somewhat, while my wits worked to solve the reason of this terrible rendering. I anticipate somewhat, but taking advantage of the fact that this MSS. is for mine eyes alone, I must write that later it transpired that these two had quarrelled the previous evening, and Miss Dulcie, with truly feminine astuteness, had seized this opportunity to flaunt love. The choir sang well enough, the altos and the trebles chiming through the aisles and losing themselves in the carved arches overhead; the booming basses joined them, the pulsating melody growing stronger and higher till it seemed to beat against the walls of the church like a panting bird seeking egress. But my supreme effect, on which I had calculated, fell dead. I had imagined the soprano rising out of the subsiding tumult in clear-winged notes: "*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.*" I hear the false notes now in all their cheap flippancy. Oh, Dulcie! Dulcie! I had thought better things of you than, for a turn of spite, so to ruin my anthem. I could better have heard Handel murdered, or listened with indifference to her pestilent noises making havoc with Purcell—but this

was mine own child, and I loved every quaver that went to its making.

Poor Dulcie! the grasses are waving high above you now, and the baritone has mourned and has found comfort again on other lips. I forgive you, but it was a sharp unkindness at the time—my teeth are all on edge in sheer remembrance.

"*Neither can the floods drown it*," she sang so out of tune that she almost sang in tune—another tune! I could not bear it—I *could* not. "Stop!" I shouted. My mother tugged my sleeve, my sister raised a reproving eyebrow, Ooterwint halted in sheer surprise. I was too wild to heed them. "For pity's sake," I cried, "go no further." And then I left my pew, and made for the door. Even in my agitation I noted the shocked glances of the villagers; the furious glare of the Rector, uncomfortably hurried to his homily, pierced my back, but even at the asinine age of seventeen I had discovered the comforting value of an exact localization of personal woe. I hated the sense of scenic effect. My "*Stop!*" two seconds after I had voiced it filled me with shame, and I burnt with mingled wrath and nervousness as I marched down the aisle. But whatever I suffered in my exit, it in

no wise matched the agony of mind concòmitant with longer waiting upon Dulcie's shrilly-voiced spite. With laughter so akin to tears and the salt of memories smarting in my eyes, I cannot but enjoy the thought of that hour. It was the most supremely ludicrous moment of my life; but at the time I detected no hint of comedy. I rushed home, I remember, and locked myself into my room, and raged and rampaged, refusing to partake of our mid-day meal although keen with hunger and tormented with a desire to shout my grief to a sympathetic audience. I could have hanged the choir high as Haman, and reserved Dulcie and the baritone for a harder fate. I cried, so far as I remember, over the unhappy fate of my music. I was only a lad, sickly and conceited, and for the time my disappointment touched anguish. Then my mother came and comforted me, and I consented to be comforted, realizing fully the while the extent of my complaisance, for it hurt her cruelly to see me grieved. She promised me that I should go to Town to study. It was a glorious anthem, had its rendering been but passable. Some day I would be a great man. Dulcie was—— she paused—an eloquent pause. And by some fantastic turn of fancy my mind

leapt back to a hot summer day—a sobbing child, half startled out of his tears by the sudden transformation of a Madonna into a virago, and clack! clack! an angry hand vibrated on the scarlet ears of a boy!

"You shall go away and study, Tony," she said, "and some day we shall all be proud." She patted my shoulder comfortingly. (I have the excuse of senility that I so dwell on these memories.) "It is ridiculous to keep you here. Ooterwint tells me that you can do anything you will," she faltered sweetly. "And now, my Tony," she whispered through her kisses, "come and have something to eat."

IV

I REMEMBER during my last weeks at home a great excitement trembling in the air; jumbled recollections of motherly exhortations concerning flannel next the skin, and hinted warnings regarding the wickedness of towns still linger in the vast limbo of my memory. Even Cecily's attitude towards me at this time savoured of respect and lost the note of patronage that had formerly characterized it. Only Ooterwint mocked at the fond foolishness of women, although he openly rejoiced at the good fortune that had befallen me.

"Every man has once his chance," he would say, half in jest and half in earnest, "and only once. Grasp it! Hold it firm! Never let go!" and then he quoted the immortal words: "There comes a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune," while I listened, already luxuriating in my future fame. For

the pitiful episode of my anthem he had nothing but laughter. "Your face, Tony—one furious glance of murderous impotence!" and then would follow a Homeric burst of mirth.

"It hurt," I endeavoured to explain, "it hurt. I had rather have burnt it than have suffered such a crucifixion."

"The first endeavour!" he mocked, "the primary effusion—so hideously mangled. Oh, youth, fair gracious youth, to be so deliciously at the beginning of things! Did it ever strike you, Tony, that a tremendous despair argues a tremendous hope?"

"I had worked so hard!" I stammered; "and it *was* music."

"Worked so hard—seventeen years hold your days, eh, Tony? And music spelt with a colossal M! I have worked fifty years, and I still—honour to myself—write music. (I knew he was thinking of his choir.) But I have been blunted. You cannot credit me, but I envy you your fever and fret. Time was"—I looked at him all agog with expectancy. Ooterwint's moments of expansion were rare—"Time was when I, too, would have known hell hearing *Set me as a seal,*'" he jigged in exact imitation of Miss Dulcie. "But now," he shrugged his

shoulders, and his eyes twinkled, "I have written for fifty years. Go on and prosper"; and so he bade me farewell.

* * * * *

It had been arranged that I should go to London and study under Mathieson, who was then considered in the front rank regarding contrapuntal instruction. I was to live in a lodging, and spend my days at the rooms where he beat knowledge into the heads of some half-dozen pupils.

On my journey to Town a fantastic incident happened to me, of which I will write, by reason of its holding a curious shadowing of the future, and also because the episode is not devoid of a certain humour. It was indeed of a caustic flavour at the time, but is so sweetened by the lapse of years that the comedy concomitant on my first squiring of dames is not a harsh remembrance.

We were but a stage from London, and had halted awhile at Doynings in order that fresh horses should be substituted for our lagging cattle. Being unaccustomed to travelling, I was somewhat weary, and gladly welcomed these opportunities of descending from the coach; in this instance I hailed the occasion with cheerful

alacrity, little guessing at the tempestuous hours that were winging their way towards me.

I entered the hostelry, and calling for a draught of ale, proceeded to settle myself into the most comfortable lounge in the tap-room. I had fain have rested in silence, but mine host carried a long tongue, and started on a generous length of gossip, regardless of my yawns; and when my attention too visibly slackened, his round face took on an added access of importance as he hinted darkly at a tale that should effectually rout my slumbers, nodding his head the while towards the stairs. An accomplished gossip, he desired to keep his tit-bit for the end, and used it as a stimulant to attention while carefully avoiding its expression. My fellow-companions hung about the doors in twos and threes, sometimes joining in our talk, but rapidly wearying of my garrulous gossip. At last, I myself could no longer endure the patter of his tongue, and half rose from my chair, when he quickly laid his hand on my arm and prayed me hearken to the romance that was in process of being enacted beneath his roof. The man beside him jeered, divining a ruse by which he sought to hold me; but now it seemed indeed as if mine host would string his hints and innu-

endoes into a plain tale, for he straightway opened fire. "An elopement," he gasped, his ruddy cheeks purpling with excitement; "two runaway lovers—they arrived this morning, hear how they quarrel!" And, sure enough, as he spoke, the shrill tones of a woman, mixed with the deeper notes of a man's voice, came floating down the stairs.

"She has wearied of him already," continued our host. "She would return to Town—he would have her press on to Gurness as first planned. Hark! she is something of a shrew for all her modish air."

"How have they come to quarrel so early?" I queried, roused from my apathy, while the others gathered round us.

"Who shall explain the workings of a woman's mind?" returned the host. "An he were wise he would further her wish," he added, as the vixenish voice rose high. "For my part——"

What he would have said I know not, for as he nodded his head with sapient air a door was loudly banged above, there was a great rustle and stampede on the stairs, and a lady suddenly appeared at the entrance leading to the upper apartments of the house. She was followed by

a young man with a shamed, flushed face, who vainly strove to restrain her.

"Sylvia," he mumbled in her rear; but she heeded him not, as she marched steadily towards the landlord, who, suddenly checked in his tale, gasped at her affrighted.

"At what hour will the coach start for London?" she began in a high-pitched voice vibrating with emotion, apparently regardless of the stares and nudges that encompassed her.

To be honest, I stared with the rest, for she made a pretty picture enough in her silks and satins, with the powder somewhat shaken from her hair, and a crimson patch of fury on each cheek paling the generous rouge.

Mine host bowed low, mumbling something about having understood that she had desired two places taken in the next coach that passed to Gurness—this he had done—but madam had changed her mind—the seats were paid for—he regretted, etc.

Such was his agitation that an incipient apoplexy threatened to interrupt his winding phrases.

Madam stamped an imperious foot.

"I asked you at what hour the coach left for London!" she shrilled—a virago in the bud.

"In another half-hour," gobbled the landlord

"Take *one* seat," she said firmly, with a most spiteful emphasis on the numeral, and an accompanying glare at the youth behind her; "I return by it."

Her companion essayed another remonstrance, laying a detaining hand on her arm; but she flung it off furiously with a passionate "Touch me not!" and darted up the stairs again.

We heard the bang of a door, the turning of a key in the lock, and then came a great peace. All eyes were fastened on the luckless gallant, who stood for a moment braving our stares; and then he flung himself out of the house, apparently finding the situation intolerable.

Though laughter bubbled in my throat, I felt something of pity for him. His position lacked dignity in marked degree, and through his discomfiture he looked cut to the heart at this inappropriate termination to his idyll. Still his demeanour was signalised in no way by despair, and when some five minutes later he galloped past the window, spurring his horse to its utmost speed, he carried an alert air of determination that suggested a conceived plan of action.

We saw no more of the lady until the coach was about to depart. The horses were rattling their harness in an anxious fret to be away, the coachman and guard were exchanging final words on the iniquities of the way bill, when suddenly she appeared, and clearing her way through the knot of assembled people, climbed into her seat. An amused glance or so followed her, for her history had been freely retailed; and audible comments on her townish graces and fashion were also not wanting.

I pitied her somewhat for the awkwardness of her position, for in that time, as this, for a woman to travel unattended, was to expose herself to much unpleasantness; and I noted that though she carried her head so high, her face was swollen as if from recent crying, and that she shrank visibly from the interested eyes about her.

Now the coach was but poorly tenanted, holding in all some half-dozen passengers, of whom five were of the yeoman class. The sixth bore the appearance of an antiquated beau, who by strenuous endeavour strove with scant success to ward off all appearance of age. It was he who had ogled the distressed damsel most freely; and I noted that instead of mount-

ing to the box seat as before, he sat down within the coach, apparently desirous of beguiling the length of road by converse with his fair companion.

For my part, loving neither the society of ladies nor the interior of coaches, I was about to mount to my old seat, when madam stuck her head from the window and pressed me to enter.

Innocent of boorish intention, I yet protested my preference for the outside; but she would take no denial, and I most unwillingly entered the coach.

Now came a blast from the horn, a lurch of the vehicle, and we were away.

Though of limited intelligence in these matters, even my obtuseness was not proof against understanding the reason of my incarceration, for the disappointed beau scowled fiercely on my entrance, while the lady insisted upon my taking a seat near her, and promptly started a most vivacious discourse.

It seemed to me, from certain symptoms, that the bibulous nose of the beruffled rake, who sulked opposite us, in no way traduced him, for he grew more and more incoherent in his talk, and otherwise testified to the generous

libations he had imbibed. Shortly, to my intense gràtitude, he slumbered peacefully, and my companion and I were practically alone.

"The drunken brute!" she snapped, regarding him with much disfavour as he snored with lolling head.

"I trust he had not insulted you before my coming?" I said formally, for in truth I felt a little shy of this brilliant lady.

"Ah, no—and with so valiant a defender I fear naught," she responded, with a twinkle in her eyes.

I feared she jested, and turned away rather sharply.

"La!" she rattled on in her high, mincing voice, "have you a soul above women?"

"No, madam," I returned with rising asperity, "but a body beneath them."

"Ah, no, no," she cajoled. "Had it not been for you"—she tossed a pregnant glance at the slumbrous swine before us—"I should have suffered a — er — temporary inconvenience."

She had an arched eyebrow, and she utilised it. "Morpheus would no doubt have saved me—in time—in time. But all things come in time."

She uttered this used platitude with a sprightly air that lent it virginity, and then glinted an arch glance at me, which I strove to meet. I failed ignominiously, and promptly feigned an incipient catarrh, and turning my head aside, buried my face in a gay bandana, and blew my nose with a great noise. Truth to tell, my manners were not over-burnished.

"Oh, hist!" she warned, "you will awake him, and I so desire to have a little private converse with you. Dare I"—she clasped a pair of much be-ringed hands—"plead a favour?"

Dare I, jumped my mind in agonised reflection—dare I refuse it? For I had no desire to be saddled with her company or her affairs, and was counting the hours to our arrival in Town. But she left me scant space for reflection, hustling me to attention by pure vigour of speech.

"You may not listen, but you shall hear," exactly phrases her attitude, and Heaven knows she was not chary of her words. She told me the history of her elopement, painting luckless Master Chetwynd in the most sombre of hues, herself in the most innocent of tints. She had given up all for love, had broken her father's heart, and deliberately relinquished by her rash

act all possibility of benefiting by his will—he never forgave.

She paused, bereft of breath, and I seized the fleeting chance and inquired the reason of their quarrelling. This I gathered but vaguely—for the lady sketched the premises with the lightest hand—arose from jealousy on her part of some past inamorata of his. She had apparently assailed her character in the grossest terms, and he, goaded beyond endurance, had foollishly striven to defend it, whereat madam had promptly bade him return to his old love, and leave her to return to London to throw herself upon the clemency of her parent.

I feared to word my thought — my companion's air suggested ignorance of adverse criticism—but I could not help thinking that her evident belief in parental forgiveness and his oblivion of things past, fitted in but badly with the picture she had drawn of a furious father, intent on testamentary vengeance.

Still I said no word, knowing the futility of reason with her sex, and in measure forgiving her the length of her tale by reason of the time and the miles it had covered.

But she, not content with an acquiescent silence, must needs jog my elbow and pester

me with questions as to what I thought of her present doings, her lover's past doings, her father's future doings—while, envying him his vicious slumber, I stared alternately at the sleeping man before us and at the flying landscape, striving to gather from the aspect of the country how far we were from our destination ; but I said no word, being terrorised from expression of my natural candour, and for the moment being only conscious of a gigantic envy of the lucky youth who had escaped from the clutches of the damsel at my side.

What—*what* had I done to be so plagued by this combustible female? cried my heart in great bitterness. It is an ill world that allows of such doings, and the rank injustice that had parcelled out to the innocent the brunt of the idle doings of the wicked filled me with impotent fury.

Had Master Chetwynd not played the fool, had Mistress Sylvia (I was ignorant of her patronymic) not assisted him with such ardour, I should have been seated without upon the coach, enjoying the fresh air and peace, in place of facing a tipsy hog, with an injured and wordy maid at my side, intent on excited recital of her wrongs.

The hysteric clamour at last proved beyond bearing, my stultified brain lost all sense of courtesy due to sex, and I spoke gruffly as I would have spoken to any hind, praying her to be silent.

"Promise me one little favour," she said for all answer. "Just this: when we arrive at London, to go and seek my father and bring him to me. I dare not seek him," she gasped, "I dare not."

"Madam," I returned, clutching at the skirts of peace, "to hear is to obey."

At least I reflected I should be quit of her, and considering what I had already borne by her being foisted upon me—I, who avoided women as the plague—a little more or less seemed of minute importance.

Having attained her end, she was graciously pleased to allow me a temporary repose, but it was of brief duration. I had just composed myself in the corner, and was feigning sleep, when she started afresh.

"We will beguile the hour by studying what the future holds."

Her sharp, decisive tones filled me with dismay.

From this there was no appeal.

"See!" she drew a pack of playing-cards from her pocket, and flourished them under my nose with a scintillating smile. "Come opposite me—so. Closer, closer," she rapped out impatiently, "so that our knees touch."

I was shocked at her forwardness, but obeyed her automatically, while she straightened out her wide skirts and commenced laying out the cards in a wide circle.

"We will learn what the future holds!"

Now I had heard of this fool's pastime, but had never seen it acted, and I stared stupefied at her rapt face as she leaned over the horseshoe she had made, carefully noting the meaning of each card and its relation to its neighbour.

The day was dying, and the guard had lit a lantern. Its light glimmered fitfully on her excited face, leaving it partly in shadow. She might have been a sybil painted by Rembrandt.

"I lay them first for myself," she panted, "then for you."

I bowed my thanks, striving by an exaggerated obeisance to suggest the contempt with which I regarded this suggestion; but she was impervious to satire.

"King of clubs and ten of hearts—a sincere

lover," she muttered. "He crosses me. Is it possible? But no. Here is the seven of spades, but in the past." A gleam of gratification passed over her silly face. "Tears lie behind me"—she flicked the five of diamonds with her finger—"also kisses. Above me the seven of hearts, knave of diamonds—jealousy. That also lies behind. Could it be that I was over-quick?"

She kept up this running commentary, apparently oblivious of my existence except so far as I served to support her cards.

"In the future, king of hearts and nine of hearts—happy love affair. Can it be?"

Her eyes brimmed up. She cut carefully with the left hand, and laid the cards afresh.

"Shall I get my wish? Here am I, the queen of clubs." Her voice vibrated with excitement. "Crossed, the saints be praised! by the wish card" (methinks the holy men would have been astonished at their company), "the nine of hearts. Do you see?" She literally banged me on the knees lest I fail to note every detail of her fooling. "Do you see? Do you understand? This is me." She planted her forefinger firmly on the queen of clubs—"this is my wish." She stuck the

wretched card beneath my very nose, and I retreated vainly. "It crosses me; I get my wish!"

Anxious to propitiate her, I mastered my aversion to her and her proceedings.

"My mission will not be in vain," I smiled. "Your father will prove of kindlier mettle than you lately anticipated."

How gaily does improvident youth engage in disaster! In a moment her face was black in the gloom, and she glared at me most furiously. She was about to speak, and I cannot doubt that her words would have matched her looks, when, to my intense relief, her mood changed, and she smiled at me with the friendliest air.

"I had forgotten for the moment," she confessed with engaging candour; "I am so rich in desires."

I gaped at her perplexed.

"You absolve me from my mission?" I said hurriedly, for indeed I had no desire to travel afield of the great city in search of an irate parent.

"Not at all," she answered quickly. "I pray you abide by your word."

Then, seeing that I looked somewhat sulky, and answered only with a glum grunt, she

started afresh with her pieces of painted card.

"Now for *your* fortune," says she, flirting her curls, and making very free with her eyes. "Here you stand."

She poked me vigorously with her fan, for I was gazing out of the window at the glooming landscape, and trying to express the contempt that I dared not voice in a disgusted back.

"Now here you are." Her rings flashed through the dusk as she shuffled the cards. "We will count you king of spades, with your black eyes and hair. Now we will see what surrounds you, what gifts great London holds in reserve."

She fluttered her cards, and I maintained a haughty silence, which deterred her in no wise.

"Oh, sakes alive!" she laughed out, with a genuine enjoyment that disturbed the sleeping toper, and woke him to a fleeting knowledge of passing events, "if there is not a fair woman spreading a net for you! Now do not glare at me, sir, for, indeed, unpowdered, I am dark, and my eyes, as you may see, are brown." She gave me the benefit of their liquid depths in a cleverly shot glance. "You escape from her clutches, but not until she has reaped a gener-

ous harvest. 'Ware, Master—by the way, I am ignorant of your name?"

"Dallas," I flung at her.

"Now, Master Dallas, I insist on your attention. You see how the cards lie"—she forced me to attention—"the fair woman uses you for her own advantage—how, I know not; but beware, for this lies in the immediate future. Further, I see"—she shuffled the cards afresh, and bade me cut, which I did most unwillingly. At this point the gentleman in the corner flung a witticism at us; on finding it ignored, he turned on his side and slumbered afresh. "Further, I see a great change in family circumstances, a stranger—a woman," her voice rose in an ever-increasing crescendo. "Her life and yours intermingle—a ring." She flung a coquettish glance at me, "There is great happiness—love follows the ring. See," she nudged me impatiently, "how the red cards preponderate!"

"Defend me," I burst out, "from all women!"

But she, heedless of my words, bent over her cards full of interest. "What happiness!" she cried, "and what blackness! The woman is gone—the love is fled. You eat your bread in strange lands, for ever pursuing—what?"

Her voice rose, and fell vibrant with feeling. "There is enmity — these spades point to trouble. Do you indulge in enemies, Master Dallas?" she asked flippantly. "Personally I regard them as luxuries—friends are a necessity. When I can afford it, I promise myself the indulgence of one or two enemies." Mistress Sylvia's eyes gleamed with a light that promised ill for the victims of her choice. "I cannot read further." She looked at me with new interest in her face; it was purged of the old frivolity, and her wide eyes were full of a mystic light. "I see as in a glass darkly," she whispered. "You jeer at me; but if, indeed, is given to you such a love as Fortune traces by the aid of these letters"—the cards slipped idly through her fingers—"be careful of it," she prayed. "Such love, when lost, is lost to all eternity."

(Nan, my Nan. I mocked her in my heart, though I spoke no word.)

"Myself," she whispered to herself, while I listened half-credulous, half-scornful, "I feel the shadow of a great tragedy."

"My tragedy is told." I shrugged my malformed shoulders. "No woman shall ever have it in her power to make or mar my fortunes."

And I gazed at her defiantly, for I knew she had exerted all her artifices to subdue me.

"She will come into your life, and for a time your days will be flooded with sunshine—such gladness as you have never dreamed will be yours. And then—and then the shadows thicken. In truth, Master Dallas, I can see no further," she broke off.

Indeed, could she have gone further with her prophesyings, there had been no time to hear them, for now the coach rattled into the court-yard of The Bear, which lies just within the shadow of Holborn, and we were at our journey's end. Mistress Sylvia promptly dropped her weird airs, and alighting briskly bade me follow her into the inn. Arrived, she plucked me by the sleeve, and drew me apart from the crowd of be-wigged and be-ruffled beaux who were thronging the entrance hall. "See," she whispered emphatically, "here is his address. Fetch him for the love of Heaven! Tell him I pray his forgiveness—that a penitent daughter awaits him. Make no error, but look carefully. Sir William Nash, of 12, Charlotte Street; you cannot mistake. Now, hurry, hurry," and she almost pushed me from her.

"Madam," I remonstrated, "I cannot leave

you here." Already people were staring at her, and anxious though I was to be quit of her and her affairs, it seemed to me impossible to leave her thus; but she ordered me away, as though I were her valet, and I—my solicitude turned to indifference by her rudeness—sped on her errand, thanking Heaven as I went that my message was not to a female. As I cut my way through the people thronging the steps, a man's back struck me with a curious familiarity (I have always held that a back more thoroughly individualises a personality than a face). The straight shoulders, that alert, well-poised head, where had I seen them before? Somewhere, and lately, of so much I was certain. No doubt, had I been less fretted, my indeterminate recognition had reached clear knowledge; but as it was I hurried on my way, dismissing all reflection but how best to accomplish my ungraceful task. Unchivalric as I was regarding superficial attendance on the sex, a woman's tears and a woman's need, resist as I might, invariably touched me.

Knowing my powers of non-resistance, I swore a great oath as I wended my way to Charlotte Street—no more petticoats for me!

My oath used a passing breath; for the rest it has availed me nothing. There was Marjory within the year, a commonplace maid enough seen by the light of later knowledge. There was—— Shall I put you in such company, my life? My heart revolts at the thought.

Far better return to Mistress Sylvia, and my desperate chase through London in search of her parent, my timepiece at intervals assuring me of the flying hours. At length I sighted the street, and arriving at the house clattered the knocker with an extreme fervour born of the desire common to all men to know the worst. Before the quarter had made its mark on my timepiece (I noted its course with feverish interest), the obdurate parent, heralded by a pleasing Abigail, was before me.

"I bring you news of your daughter." I flung the intelligence at his head, and he straightway anticipated the news.

"He has deserted her," he tossed at me.

"Pardon me," I returned with a not unpardonable acerbity, "she has deserted him; she craves"—I hurried on in an ever-increasing feverishness—"your pardon—her rehabilitation in your affections."

Now with great eagerness he took me by

the arm, and, interrupting me at every other word with questions, he drew the story of what had passed from me. Grateful though he professed himself, I could see that he felt I was amply rewarded for my trouble in acting as his daughter's emissary, and by the knowledge of having been of service to her. Vainly I searched for symptom of the stern parent so graphically depicted by Mistress Sylvia; I saw only an old man, fond and foolish as any Lear, with tremulous hands, and eyes that filled with every allusion to his beloved child.

"She was always wild," he said fondly. "A maid so lovely is beset with temptation. Master Chetwynd has a winning tongue, yet how could I doubt that she would return to her old father?"

And so he maundered while we traversed London at such speed as a chaise could take us. He fumed and fretted, eternally urging the driver to renewed effort, as if the tiresome female I had left at the inn embodied the Mecca of his dreams.

We arrived! Gladly would I leave the following lines blank, for young or old, simpleton or wiseacre, who cares to write himself a sheep? But this is the story of Punchinello, known only

to himself, and embracing his years between seven and twenty-three—even the astute biographer is ignorant of this foolishness, so let it pass. I had rather not be as dull as that erudite gentleman, so quench a desire to talk alternately of my music and my love, and relate my tale as it occurred.

Who will may scoff! We arrived, my reverend Signor and I—he bubbling over with fatherly affection, I conscious of a certain trepidation regarding the course of events. I could not forget the glare of anger with which Mistress Sylvia had received my reading of her wish. I certainly brought its lawful fulfilment; but who shall satisfy a mind so rich in desires that while the breath of the one is in the air another is agape for satisfaction? In my mind I saw the calf carefully roasting in Charlotte Street, already the ring was fitted on the prodigal's finger.

We passed together, he and I, through the knots of people that filled the entrance to the inn where I had left his penitent offspring. An hour or so had passed, and more than one coach had deposited its freight and taken up fresh passengers since my departure. There were new faces in the tap-room, and the apart-

ment in which Mistress Sylvia had promised to await me was filled by a country family, all agog with excitement at the thought of having entered the precincts of magic London. They were flattening their noses on the window-panes when I entered.

"Mistress Sylvia," I began gaily, and promptly started, greenhorn that I was, at being greeted with a jingle of giggles that seemed to emanate from every corner of the room. I retired, quickly followed by the anxious father, who crooned low terms of endearment beneath his breath, all of which I have no doubt were intended for the absent Sylvia. Then, scenting evil, I shook him off, and beseeching speech with the landlord asked him if he had noted aught of Mistress Sylvia and her movements. He remembered her well enough (she was of the type that insists on recognition in any company, however motley), and received my inquiries with a sapient twinkle in his eye. "Mistress Sylvia Nash departed for Gurness by the last coach," said he, obsequiously rubbing his hands the while. Blankly staring before me, I yet realised that he waited carefully on my countenance, striving to learn how far he dared, by a venturesome wink, express

his understanding of the complex position. My determination that he should not enjoy the moment stung me to the exercise of histrionic ability hitherto undreamed of.

"Ah," I said, turning on my heel. "No doubt she has received intelligence that necessitated her departing before my return. She expected it, and mentioned the possibility before I left her, but"—(here I feigned an anxious air—who knew better than I Mistress Sylvia's genius for self-preservation?)—"it is hardly the place or the hour for a gentlewoman to travel unattended. I would," I sighed—God forgive me!—"I had returned in time."

"She was not unattended," he said respectfully; "be not troubled on this count. She——" but I departed hurriedly, suddenly cognizant of the elusive personality that had struck me with a curious fugitive resemblance in the courtyard just after I had left Mistress Sylvia. Now I remembered where I had before seen the careless carriage of the head, the straight, well-built shoulders—they had flung defiance at us as the owner had rushed out of the tap-room. Master Hugh Chetwynd had no doubt vowed vengeance on the veiled smiles of the company.

Could he but have known it, one individual paid the debt in full.

The lusty laugh of the landlord, as I hurried away, jangled in my ears. My powers of endurance snapped short, and left me shorn of all artificial courtesies. I marched straight to where Sir William waited for his daughter, his expectant eyes fastened on the door, the unspoken word of forgiveness trembling on his lips. Now Heaven knows I pitied him from my heart in having begot such a jade as Mistress Sylvia, and went to him in all tenderness of spirit, seeking, as I walked, how easiest to break him the uncomfortable news. I mind that in the supreme moment my diplomacy deserted me, and that sharply cutting short his passionate cry of *Sylvia*, I told him the truth in all its ugly baldness. When I had done he said no word but "Sylvia, Sylvia," crying her name with trembling mouth as a hurt child, and then launched into a passionate diatribe against Master Hugh Chetwynd, who had again lured her from the paths of righteousness.

"She will marry him," I blurted, in haste to console, regretful as I spoke that I had carelessly posed my pronouns. "She satisfies a romantic craving — you will dandle your

"grand-children on your knee and thank this hour."

"I would she had told me," he sobbed for all answer. "To think of her at the mercy of that rake! He will ill-use her; had he not already done so, why should she have desired to return? He has followed her, or rather been beforehand with her, and again seduced her with fair words." He paused, gasping for breath.

Now I could not bear to see so much fine feeling and affection wasted on the soulless woman, and seized the opportunity to disillusion him as to the veritable worth of the baggage he was bewailing. Disillusionment is ever an ungrateful process, and I noticed, as I proceeded, that my listener regarded me with growing anger. "What mean you, sir?" he said, when I had detailed my version of Mistress Sylvia's escapade.

"I mean," I stammered, "I mean——" I had no doubt as to my meaning, but how most happily to express it passed my comprehension. "I mean," I said, again flurried into idiocy.

"Sir," said he, with an awful calmness, "I await your pleasure."

The truth leapt to my lips for all my gallant endeavour to lie adequately. "Sir," I stam-

mered, "accept my best congratulations. Give to Master Chetwynd—an you ever see him—my heartfelt sympathy." God knows I had not flouted him for the world, but I had been over-tried, and my patience was frayed to rags.

He stared at me for a moment petrified, and, as he stared, I felt a sickly smile skulk over my face in endeavour at propitiation. That was one moment, the next I stood without the door reflecting on the ease with which a summary ejection had been performed and the foolishness of venturing within a mile of a woman.

But for all the indignity to which I had been subjected, as I left the inn, glad to have at last shaken myself free of Mistress Sylvia and her business, I did not forget to waft a prayer heavenwards for Master Chetwynd.

Anxious as I was to forget her and her follies, as I wended my way to the house where I was to lodge during my stay in Town, her prophecy haunted me. "Be careful, Master Dallas, for such love, when lost, is lost to all eternity."

I scorned her words, yet for a time they would not be ignored. Now in this sad time of waiting they are ever with me, insistent with their presage of the unforgotten hours; still I

know, for all her mysterious foreshadowing of events yet unborn, that she was not infallible, that a love once lost, however great, shall live again. Why else on sunny days, my sweetheart of long ago, dancing beneath the spreading boughs, flinging kisses in remembrance?

Mad? No, not mad! But the line is over-delicately drawn, and to remember and regret, to linger and repent overmuch, is foolish work. Better to get on with my story and the telling of the time that my biographer has so successfully ignored, those sixteen years in which all the life I have lived lies crushed in the dust, yet blossoming with fairer memories than all the gorgeous years.

You sweated hard in the performance of your duty, my biographer. You were greedy of detail and quick-set with hunger of the immaterial. Much you wrote and right well, but not my life—my little life counted in the brief spell of sixteen summers.

V

THOSE studious days of mine were flavoured with a sweetness that my more prosperous times have lacked. For whole days we never saw our master, and worked or lounged as fitted our humour. For myself I slaved, struggling with counterpoint and harmony, endeavouring to understand the old masters and in some measure to express mine own melodies. We had a gay time enough among ourselves. I lived in the same house as Simon Mäers, a Dutchman by extraction, who was for ever writing oratorios of, I must admit, a most shocking quality. He had no genius for composition, being intended by nature for an executant, largely gifted in perception, with an exquisite ear, and of great physical address, with pliant hands and long fingers. Violinist was indeed inscribed upon him, but he burned to compose, and would spend long hours in vain travail to be at last rewarded with a monstrosity. Sometimes he

would forget his ambitions and allow himself to take the part assigned to him by God Almighty, choosing some thought of Tartini and throwing it forth to men in all its graciousness, and almost before the sweetness had left the air, rending it with lamentations that he could never hope to match so fair a creation, oblivious to the fact that without such middlemen (if I may be allowed so vulgar a simile) as he, creative genius and the world at large had stood parted to all eternity by an impassable chasm.

I mind him one evening, when the day's work was over, and we were both too outwearied to seek amusement without, how he seized his violin and played a little romance of his own composing. I shivered as I heard him, for it was as if poor puerilities were clothed in fair form and he endeavoured to cover deformity by fair adorning. It came to an end at last, and he asked me what I thought; and as I hesitated, fearing to say how I loved the manner and abhorred the matter, he dropped his head upon the table for a moment and then lifted wet eyes reviling the gift of exquisite expression with which the good God had blessed him.

"I have it. I know. I know it all." With a

sudden change of mood he turned and laughed. "Look at me," he cried; "I am interesting from the psychological point of view. I am pregnant with unborn symphonies; my unsung songs would fill many a programme; but I cannot write, I cannot. Directly I strive to give my thoughts expression, they evade me and vanish into thin air. I suggest paint, ink, and pencil. I am a medium, Mr. Anthony, for the telling of other men's tales. It is not amusing." Poor lad, it was the old struggle—the passion for creation and no creative power, coupled with a delicacy and facility of perception that made him an exquisite executant. He renewed my passion for the violin, and I learnt to play with ease, taking to all things musical with the utmost naturalness.

Now up to this date I had known, exclusive of Mistress Sylvia, nothing of the charms of femininity, regarding woman indeed as a superfluous sex, of excellent use no doubt for persons who desired to be born, but lacking in value except from an utilitarian point of view. My mother, indeed—but then she was my mother! As a rule I regarded the sex disinterestedly, occasionally according a supercilious tribute to their attractions from my superior masculine

vantage. Sweet maids had rarely smiled upon me: I lacking physical charms and adding to the boyish clownishness common to all lads of my age a morose manner grafted upon an original awkwardness by the realisation of my deficiencies.

But Simon was of another way of thinking. I was for ever hearing of ladies whose charms I fancied to be of an evanescent nature, so quickly did these stars succeed each other. But there was one fixed planet in his gay constellation, one Marjory Davenant, which never waned. The charms of this lady were eternally sounded in my ears. Never before had one woman so absolutely exemplified the delights of femininity. Her beauty of feature was only second to her beauty of soul; she was gay, sympathetic, pretty as a flower; her voice was musical—he laid great stress on its delicacy of timbre, as befitted one whose trade was sweet sound. Mistress Marjory was, I heard, a damsel of fair means, being the daughter of a physician who lived in a comfortable solid mansion some way out of town, at Calingham, on the river. Here Simon would often betake himself for his brief interlude of holiday. He often invited me to accompany him on these

expeditions, and I as eternally refused him, being shy of women, as I have said. But one Sunday I succumbed to his entreaties and went with him. I regard this visit as a turning-point in my life, for it was the means of transforming me from a raw boy into a man. Woman, whatever her faults, is an excellent educator at this period of existence.

When I was first introduced to Mistress Marjory, I suffered a very anguish of disappointment. At this time, although mortally afraid of women, I loved looking at them, delighting in the graceful lines and soft colours, the pretty smiles and dainty ways that go to the making of a fair feminine creation. Mistress Marjory had, however, little to offer from an æsthetic point of view. In truth she startled me when I first saw her.

She was broidering at a work frame when we entered the reception room, and jumped up from it suddenly. "Simon," she said quickly, "Simon!" and looked at him with a great transfiguration, metamorphosing her from a plain woman to a beautiful one—so great a power is love—and then shot a curious glance at me out of her grey eyes, as she bade me welcome.

She was a diminutive woman, with flaxen hair and insignificant features, no longer in the first freshness of youth, yet with something about her that compelled attention. God had, indeed, balanced her chary charms with a tender voice and a luminous smile, yet looking at her it was hard to say where the arresting charm that individualised her personality lay.

At first I was, as I have written, disappointed, but before the day had died I envied Simon, who, to my mind, accepted the gift of the gods with an indifference that bordered on irreverence. He loved her no doubt, and she loved him, as he explained with a fatuous chuckle, and he was fortunate. But, to my mind, he regarded his future as too assured; it seemed to me a tremor or so would have been graceful.

From the first, silly fool that I was, she twisted me round her finger—I, who had always hated women, or so feigned to myself, fighting ever to believe this lie, now fell in love, as I called it, with a passion that bade fair to set my whole life out of gear. I knew it was hopeless, or, to be accurate, believed it to be so at the commencement of our acquaintance. She was a clever woman, so clever that she disguised the slightest symptom of learning, showing her

ability only in her quick appreciation of the wit of others, and in a never-failing faculty to fill any awkward hiatus that should arise. She was so clever that, desiring to please me, I being a friend of the adored Simon, she never for all her kind words or looks made the mistake of poisoning the sweetness by a note of pity. She did me an awful mischief, but I uncover my head to her aptitude and forgive her; it was all due to that Simon.

I do not think, to be just, that she had any thought of utilising me in the first stage of our acquaintance; she fell a victim to expediency. To put it brief, she encouraged my nascent adoration until I pitied Simon in my vanity. From going to visit her with him and expecting little of her society—Simon, having an egoistic way of taking her out for a stroll, leaving me to converse with her father—I soon paid her visits on my own account at her express invitation, and we would spend delightful days together. She was adorably companionable, and I know no better place to work a young man's undoing than summer hours by the Thames.

At this time both Simon and I were greatly exercised in our minds owing to a scholarship

for composition that was being offered in London. He had, I knew, no chance of it, but he struggled in impotent throes to achieve success, impelled not only by his own ambition but by a sharp desire to excel in the eyes of his beloved. I knew nothing of what he was doing, all of us keeping our endeavour secret from each other, but I guessed from his fretted air and the bitterness of his moods that, as ever, he was hammering at a closed door. Marjory knew of this scholarship. She suffered, poor maid, from Simon's despairs on the one hand and from my premature jubilation on the other, and bore with us with patience, wishing us both success with the prettiest kindness. Now we could not both succeed, and I knew where her wishes lay, so I have no excuse for my folly excepting my youth and the preference she had of late so violently accorded me. But, on my life, at this time I believed she wished me first, and I worked and strove, fired with love as well as with ambition.

"Whistle me one of your motifs, Anthony," she said to me one hot afternoon as we drifted down the river; I pretending to scull, but in truth lost in contemplation of her who sat before me, looking in her white lacy draperies

a very poem of daintiness. I had been talking to her for the last hour of my hopes and ambitions, boring her, as I understood later, most mercilessly, although at the time my gladness was unchequered. We had hardly mentioned Simon, she speaking of his gifts of composition slightingly, and I answering her in acquiescence.

My hopes were burning very high that day; it seemed to me a decade in place of a few short weeks since I had thought myself debarred from the felicity enjoyed by others. I was undeniably deformed, but there are other gifts than the physical, and I was beginning to understand my worth. I was cleverer far than Mäers, and would go where he could never hope to reach. I was inflated at this time with my coming honours, and mazed with vanity. She apparently held my deformity of minor moment, accepting my homage as kindly as though it emanated from one of Fortune's favourites. My hopes and dreams were gay enough that afternoon. What if after all I were unnaturally morbid? Alas, poor Punchinello! This was my mood as we drifted down the river.

"You are secure, you think, of this prize?" she asked, while I reflected as to which melody I should select from out my cantata.

"I fear not Simon," I laughed in my conceit. Her eyes clouded and the pink in her face deepened, but she answered my mirth. "There is Max Verlene," I added. In my mind I held Verlene, with the exception of myself, the cleverest of us, and kindly vouchsafed him a recognition in my optimistic hour. "But I have small doubt as to the winner," I added conceitedly.

She looked at me again out of her eyes that were clear and changing as the waters, and asked me once more to let her hear some of my melodies. I began to whistle a song in the third act, which I held to be the gem of my writing, and Marjory listened eagerly. She was a musician herself of no mean order, for a woman, and understood the difference between good and evil.

I paid a fair price later for my happiness, but I had my hour, which is always something, and I would not have my memory ravished of it for a ransom. It was the gayest afternoon; a light wind stirred the river and bent the reeds on the banks, making strange music in them, till it seemed as if Pan might be lying concealed therein. There were times when the breeze parted them bravely, and I could have sworn to

a strange shape lying half hidden and piping gaily. The guelder trees were white with flower; the flush of the dog-rose warmed the tangled briars lying over their reflected faces. I dally, but it warms the chill blood that runs so lingeringly in my veins to remember that day again. The whisper of the willows and the great lilies floating on the breast of the river; far away the fields of young wheat tossing, all green and gold; the uplands, over which the black belts of the woods lay in gloomy masses to where the horizon cut a clean line and the skies trembled to earth, and over it all glimmering the blessed sunshine, lying like a gilded veil. It was a dangerous environment, and I was never over-wise. So I looked at Marjory, half intoxicated with the beauty round me, and lost such wit as I possessed. I whistled my melody—all my melodies. I explained to her the scheme of my cantata. I showed her my particular gem, hurriedly noting it on paper, which she thrust into the bosom of her gown, saying she would like to try it on her harpsichord. All the things I had so long and jealously concealed from others I gave Marjory in that hour, and made love to her besides; all of which madness I ascribe to the sights and

sounds of that midsummer day, the phantasies by which nature so often aids a woman's art to further a man's undoing. She was very kind to me and in no wise repelled my advances, although betraying an inconvenient anxiety to converse on music. Commonly, I had fathered the desire, but on this halcyon day I desired to talk of love. I was a novice in the graceful art of phrase-making, and I blundered forth my adoration with a lamentable disregard of sequence. I loved her . . . loved her so . . . that was the burden of my song so far as memory serves; and, unbelievable as it seems at this far date, it sounded quite a fresh and original declaration. To be so satisfied by the mere gazing at a woman that one was content to sit and drink in the sight of her, finding fresh beauty in every scanned line, to hear new music in her voice at every parting of her lips, to know rest in her presence and fret at her going, was all new to me, never having enjoyed the ghost of a romance, and I felt that some of my passion must necessarily infect her. She was very, very gracious to me, I mind. Her repulsions of my suit were so kind that in my hot haste I could have termed them encouragements. She bade me come and see her again

and to bring with me my music, and I accepted gladly, without thought of treason to Simon. Indeed, I was irresponsible at that time, suffering violently from the innocuous malady which the cynics term calf-love. I admit I played no pretty part, but my punishment matched the crime. Here followeth the tale of my undoing, which can be told in some half-dozen phrases.

I had submitted my cantata in order with the others, and awaited with anxiety the result of the competition, which was given in due course. For all my vain-glorious talk I had some doubts of Verlene; he was diabolically clever, but was not, I genuinely believed, so dowered by God as I. Still he had claims enough to power to give me a wakeful night or so. For the rest I had no fear. Imagine then my astonishment when I learned that Simon Mäers headed the list, and that Verlene was second, and that my name was not mentioned. I received, indeed, a private note, asking me to call at the residence of Dr. Grenfell, who was one of those concerned in the awarding of this scholarship. My brain was in such a whirl of fury and frenzy that even Marjory for the time faded from my recollection, and I was only alive to my ignominious failure. I hastened to

the Doctor's, arriving in such a tumult of feeling that I could hardly greet him when he entered the room.

He was a large portly person, with a rubicund countenance that suggested an intimate acquaintance with the delights of the table, and an exceedingly urbane manner. He was celebrated, I learned later, for his aversion to aught that savoured of friction and trouble, and had apparently escaped the unpleasantnesses of life with much success.

"Good-morning, Mr. Dallas," he purred; "pray be seated." He waved me towards a capacious chair, in which I rashly seated myself and was speedily enveloped. I struggled to the edge of it, and sat waiting.

"I have come," I began intelligently. It was not my place to speak, but the words would not be withstood. "I do not understand——"

He waved his hand again and I was dumb, oppressed by the signal weight of his personality. "There is so much in life, my dear young friend, that we cannot understand," he sonorously enunciated. He had a passionate prejudice in favour of the trite. "I have sent for you," he went on placidly, "owing to a—er—somewhat unpleasant incident connected with the—er—

competition. I say unpleasant, but there—er—is no reason for—er—unpleasantness. An explanation will, no doubt—er—explain everything." His placid patter of words drove me to the confines of madness, but I kept my tongue between my teeth and prayed for patience.

"There is a curious similarity between your work and that of Mäers," he resumed.

But I could bear no more. I slipped from my chair and confronted him. As he was sitting and I standing, our faces were almost on a level. "It—" I stammered, "I—he—we——"

He regarded me imperturbably and purred afresh. "Agitation is always to be deplored. Pray be seated," he implored me—there was almost a note of pain in his voice. "The prize has been awarded to Mäers," he went on a shade more quickly, spurred no doubt by the reflection that the speedier his communication, the speedier my departure. "There was, indeed, little to choose between the compositions, but the final vote was cast in favour of Mäers. As we do not understand the similarity between the pieces, and Mäers can throw no light, we thought that you might possibly be able to do so."

A horrible answer to the riddle was in my

mind, but I still kept silence. Had I opened my mouth, it would have been to cry, "Fool! fool!"

"May I see his cantata?" I asked humbly.

"Most certainly." He opened a drawer at his elbow, and handed me Mäers' composition.

His cantata! It was *mine*—almost note for note, stolen from me as cleverly as theft was ever yet committed. My song, that I showed so proudly on the river that day, here it was; and now I understood why, for all our amorous divergences, we had always returned to music as the *Leit-motif* of our talk.

"You can explain," began the suave voice again. The Doctor was regarding me nervously; something of my disturbance had communicated itself to the air, and he felt the uncongenial element. I wanted time, and sought foolishly to attain it.

"Why, if both cantatas were equal, was Mäers given the preference?" I asked, knowing well that my colleague had friends that sat in high places and that the answer was not far to seek. He hesitated for a moment, and then spoke some commonplace explaining the preference by some fictitious superiority in Mäers' work which I knew well did not exist. I hardly heard, being

so stunned and bruised by this discovery of perfidy. My attention was rivetted by little details of the room, from which my eyes wandered to the window, whence I could see the gray [illegible]s of Westminster, and in the distance a silver twinkle of water, gay with shipping. My eyes came back to the room and fastened on a heavy bookcase, packed with Latin and Greek authors, lending an air of erudition to the apartment. Among them was Plato, and I wondered inconsequently how far his philosophy had availed him in my present plight. Then my eyes in their journeyings about the room arrived at Grenfell and fastened on his eupeptic rosiness. I wondered how he had so successfully evaded the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Then, to my eternal shame be it said, I began to giggle, with wet eyes, suffering from what the women term hysterics. A great knot rose and choked me in my throat. I desired to weep, and yet laboured to keep back mad laughter. "Tut-tut," he clucked, "agitation is always to be deplored,—always to——" And then my risibility won the day, and I rocked in my chair, shaken with hideous mirth. I laughed and laughed, with tears running down my cheeks, till I had to pause for lack

of breath. Every time I realized the fulness of my gullibility I shouted again, and when, added to this, I incidentally caught sight of the troubled face of the Doctor, startled out of all its normal placidity, fresh fuel was added to my merriment. The river and the lilies—Marjory in her white gown—my golden afternoon—the pleasant fooling in which I had so fervently indulged—Mäers the victor in a trial for composition—it was too excellently ludicrous, and the large pink face before me puckered into unaccustomed worried lines from which ever issued, "Be calm; be calm! Nothing is ever gained by agitation; all, no doubt, can be pleasantly explained." I got away somehow, leaving my inquisitor under the impression that I was a plagiarist of the first water, and not an agreeable one at that (which last I cannot help thinking did for me finally in his favour). A plagiarist may be pardoned; but a plagiarist who plagiarises crudely, and accepts natural queries with shrieks of laughter and tears, who is unpleasant to the eyes and who apparently finds it impossible to do things "pleasantly," was practically damned in Dr. Grenfell's eyes. "So very fatiguing," he sighed in my rear as I left him, promising incoherently to explain

everything next day. "So very fatiguing—and you know, my dear young friend," he laid a hand upon my shoulder, which I shook off, and departed in a flourish of cachinnation, punctuated by farewell.

In the first turmoil of feeling I felt that I had relegated myself to the lowest asinine imbecility possible. I had been tricked, fooled with such infinite ease, that apparently no further outlet for such particular incapacity was possible; but the Fates furthered me downwards.

I went to my room, I remember, and tried to grasp the situation. Of course Marjory was blameless. Simon had by some chance got wind of my ill-advised confidences and utilised them. She had been tricked, and no doubt at this moment was suffering agonies from the prick of a tender conscience, and yet—— Here an interval of intelligence intervened, and I tried to dismiss Mistress Davenant from my thoughts. The position, indeed, was ugly enough. It is unpleasant to start professionally branded with the stigma of plagiarism, and I failed to see how it was possible to clear myself without involving Marjory, at which thought I revolted for all my anger. Simon at least should hear what I thought of him; but when

the heart is one white blaze of anger, words, however biting, seem but a poor revenge. I cursed my puny inches, as I thought of the physical perfection that so effectually defended him from me. One thing was possible to me—To write to Marjory and accuse her straightly of her act. I knew it would avail me nothing eventually, but I grasped at the solace of delivering myself; and so with mighty preparations I sat down and indited an epistle. As I filled my pen and drew my paper towards me, I had no fears of finding suitable expression for my fury; but no sooner had I made all arrangements than I found myself confronted with an apparently insuperable obstacle. How commence? For the last weeks, I had run through the varied stages of address, beginning formally and ending in most lover-like terms. Now I had to recommence, which I did with the stateliest courtesy. I found a copy of my letter lately. It is a curious document, commencing with frigidity and ending in a flare of boyish anger.

"MISTRESS MARJORY" (it opened severely), "I am informed that my cantata and that written by Mr. Simon Mäers are practically

identical.' As to my certain knowledge he knows nothing of my writing, I arrive unwillingly at the conclusion that you have betrayed the foolish confidence reposed in you by me. I write to inform you that I intend instructing the authorities at the earliest possible date of the reason of this peculiar similarity."—(Now here I should have stopped, remaining her obedient servant, but my heart was stronger than my head, and I resumed in a burst of opprobrious epithets.)—"False, fickle! I cannot find words strong enough to express my loathing of the meanness of which you have been capable. Oh, Marjory! all the hours I was basking in your presence you were meditating this villainy. Marjory, I can even now not believe it. Write and tell me it is false. Suggest some means by which Simon has been enabled to outwit me. Marjory, my loved one, I have not yet seen my enemy, who is away from Town. Possibly, when accused, he will admit his guilt and I shall be for ever abashed."—(The mere fact of corresponding with my loved one made the charm of her presence felt, and as I wrote I almost believed that she was guiltless.)—"Write to me and set my mind at ease." I ended, "Marjory, my beloved, I cannot bear

this foul surmise that has come to me in my dire distress. Marjory, forgive me!

"Your broken-hearted

"ANTHONY."

This curious effusion I sealed and sent hurriedly, not daring to wait longer. It had hardly been gone an hour when I heard a tremulous knocking at my door, and Simon entered. "Anthony," he said, "Anthony." His voice was broken and died away ashamed. He closed the door behind him and stood looking at me. Never have I seen a man so honestly abashed; his eyes refused to meet mine and sought the floor, while his hands pulled feverishly at each other. "Yes," I said, "what would you?" He dropped into a chair and hid his face between his hands. "She tempted me," he said at last. Now before, I had not thought highly of Mr. Mäers, but at these words I found him the sorriest cur that ever stepped on earth. I made no answer, and he went on: "She tempted me; she said it would help on our marriage. With this success I shall get more offers for public playing. Besides, there is the money; with what I have already saved, the sum is almost complete. Her father will not give her

to me unless I have a fair sum on which to commence my married life. The disgrace, the shame," he stammered in his incoherent talk, and failed to meet my eyes. "You will be silent, Anthony, for her sake?" Now indeed I thought he had touched the lowest rung. "Anthony, it means so little to you, you are so clever, neither do you want the money. There will be no scandal; they will not press the point. My uncle is one of the judges; he has his suspicions; but he is only too glad that I succeed by foul means, if not by fair, to press the point! Anthony!" But still I sat silent with locked lips.

Then without in the passage I heard the patter of feet, and a woman closely veiled entered and flung herself before me on her knees. It was Marjory, with the fair whiteness of her face all blurred by tears. "For my sake, Anthony," she said, and no word more, while her sobs shook her from head to foot.

This I could not bear, and I tried to raise her, but she clung to me, always with that piteous whisper—"Promise me, Anthony? Oh, the shame, the shame! I am undone!"—till I could stand it no longer.

"You are safe from me," I said sharply,

fighting to speak indifferently, for the world seemed rocking. And in a flash she was on her feet, her eyes were dried and her lips smiling.

"Good Anthony," she said sweetly, "I could not help it—I was so sorely tempted. We do strange things for love," she mused, "and Simon there has not the gift, for all his cleverness. I *so* desired to help him," she explained, with a glance at her lover, who stood beside her with shamed, averted head. "Good-bye, Tony," she added. "You forgive, eh? We do much for love."

Here I spoke. "At times we leave a thing undone—for love," said I. She looked a trifle abashed, and hurried towards the door, followed by Miers. Was it my fancy that a triumphant glance flashed between them? "*A fair woman shall lay a net*——" "You did not care at all, then?" I faltered. God knows why!

"For you?" she said, startled. Her eyes enveloped me, and I shrank from the contemptuous compassion.

"Oh go," I said, and they left me. And when they were gone I sobbed with bent head, not for the anguish of my disappointment, which indeed was keen, nor yet for the trickery

to which I had been subjected, nor for loss of friend and love. All was swamped in a great wave of pain. "For *you*?" It had been so genuine—the amused compassion in her eyes.

O God, what had I done that Thy Hand should be so heavy on me? "For *you*?" Scant wonder that she was amazed that I, poor stunted dwarf, should harbour the same desires as the handsome lad at her side. "For you?"—the light words stung as a lash. Yet never had I said, "She tempted me."

VI

IT spoke largely for the favouritism of these times that so glaring a theft could be committed with impunity, and indeed connived at by the judges; for nothing but connivance explains the ease with which my lame apology satisfied the examiners. I term it an apology for lack of a better word; it was, indeed, no explanation, being a confused jumble of words in which I traced the identity of the compositions partly to coincidence, and possibly to my having heard Mäers' songs in embryo. My apology was so absurd that I could not think it would pass; yet it was impossible for me to devise a better plan, thrash my brains as I might. So far did decency prevail that the prize was withheld from us both, and Mäers gained nothing by his lady's strategy. This arose in great part, I imagine, from the open incredulity of some others—Verlene pre-eminently—who, knowing both Mäers and myself,

I mind in whose veins ran a strain of Gallic blood, for whom I felt something of love. He was the prettiest lad, with a face like a girl, and professed the ethics of a Don Juan. Listening to his talk was as seeing worms crawl from out the heart of a rose, so terribly incongruously did his lewd words steal out of his innocent-seeming lips. He was a poet, and as yet unlaurelled. According to his own showing, the world was all to blame for its tardy recognition of his merits, but he endured no uneasiness as to the ultimate tribute. Being a youth of lively parts, he was exceedingly partial to feminine society, and not over-fastidious as to the ethics of the damsel who served to while away the hour. "Women are like flowers," he sneered in the loose talk which I hated—"when faded, fit only to be tossed away. Dear loves, I have had many; see here!" And he would show me locks of hair and faded blossoms by the gross, the sketched head of a celebrated courtesan, at which he looked with much satisfaction. "I share her favours with one who sits in a high place," he said with a horrid laugh; and so he would talk, all his speech informed with the dreary negation of his creed that held *nil* both virtue in woman and honour in man; and I

would look at him in wonder, for always it seemed to me that he was fretted to madness by a fever of unrest, and struggled to drown despair in dissipation. I individualise him from out the general herd because he stands among my memories a pathetic personality, all his gross living and grosser talk, and when the end came it was proved that my intuitions had not proved me false. He met his death in a duel fought with a man with whom he had picked a quarrel in a coffee house, because of some fancied insult when both were hot with wine.

When he lay a-dying he sent for me, and I went in great fear of what he would be suffering at the thought of death—he who had been so piteously in love with life. But he met me with the gay philosophy that had ever characterised him, saying only: "It is written," and essaying even, as he lay bandaged in his bed, a weak shrug of shoulder. But at the last he gave his whole life the lie, for as I sat beside him, my heart sick with pity at sight of the gray anguish written in his face that so denied its simulated indifference he fell to fingering something hanging round his neck by a chain, and I saw the tense lines of his features relax and quiver. 'Slip it from the chain," he prayed weakly, and

I undid the little heart-shaped locket and put it in his hands, where the feeble fingers plucked at it, fighting the stubborn clasp. I read the desire in his face and undid the catch, and the hinge slipped back, showing the fair, sedate face of a maid of some twenty years. "I loved her," he said with a little laugh that mocked a sob, "but she was for the good God. . . . My dear—my dear!" and he fell to crying in his great weakness. "She was my wife a week," he wept. "Jess—my pretty Jess! I wanted to forget her, and now I shall never see her more—so base am I." The room was littered with evidence of his late libertinage, and now in the supreme hour his mind, as if slipped from a leash, was back with the only pure love he had ever known. "Jess—Jess," he cried, ever weaker, till death stilled his crying, and he slept with cold lips pressed to the smiling miniature.

When all was finished, I put the little gold piece on his breast and went home wondering. None of us had ever known of his past marriage. He had cheated us all, even himself, until the eleventh hour, and then the ghost of the past rose up, and the present was as nothing. To escape the smart of the intolerable memory, he had flung himself into a whirl of feverish dissi-

pation, wronging the very memory upon which he had cried to help him through the Valley of Shadows. I cannot think he cried vainly. There was a peace on his face when all was over that it had never known in l[illegible] Who shall say? Did she leave Christ's [illegible]rs and stand by him at the last for love of the old days? "Jess!"—the last cry had rung jubilant as if a Presence from the Spirit Land had waited on him. Infinite is God's clemency, say the priests. Infinite is woman's love, cry the generations of all time. When the wings of Azrael flutter over me, will you answer, sweetheart, or shall I cry in vain?

For all my work and multitudinous interests, my mind was wont to stray to my home, and I was always eager to welcome my mother's letters. She wrote to me constantly, but her epistles had a fault of wasting space on me and my doings, in place of narrating the history of her days. For all her meagre words I gathered that Mistress Nancy had wound herself into my mother's heart, although she rarely mentioned her name without deploring the vagaries of her moods. My mother had a prejudice in favour of convention, especially regarding maids, and Nan flung her cap, to clumsily translate, over

the windmills many times a day. But the weeks slipped past, and I seemed to read a hint of illness between the lines. "I am feeling stronger," she wrote; "this autumn briskness braces me finely." This sentence haunted me, arguing, as it did, a past weakness; but when I inqui[illegible]elating it I received a most mirthful epistle for my pains, in which she told me she was luxuriating in the rosiest health. "I would come to Town to prove it," she wrote, "did I not dread the long journey," etc., etc., with gay gibes at my womanish faddishness which fancied a wasting distemper at the slightest excuse.

Now I, being but a man, read and believed, although I took an opportunity that shortly offered itself of posting to Chilwaithe. I spent a week in my home, but could detect nothing amiss in my mother, save that she was slighter than of yore, and that her eyes burnt with a new fire—for the rest she seemed well enough. Mistress Nancy had wondrously developed; she was prettier than ever, but had a new manner, having entirely lost the childish air that had characterised her, and treated me with a civil aloofness. Her nascent modishness was explained when I learned that she intended to spend the following season in Town with the

Lady Agatha, who boasted the key to the inmost sanctuaries of fashion. She made something of a grimace when she vouchsafed me this information, her love for her godmother having apparently in no wise increased, but seemed pleased at the thought of change and, above all, of peacocking in the Mall.

...rs

X

I RETURNED to Town with my head full of my cousin. The past image I had entertained of her was wholly obscured by this later development, for the Nan I had known was gone and a maid waiting on womanhood was in her place. She had developed a curious shyness which jarred strangely with what I remembered of her past ease. There was a truce to all impertinence, and we mutually showed each other an extreme courtesy that bordered on formality—no more dancing *al fresco*! But I loved her the more for her difficult primness, and none the less that I knew she could never be mine.

In the ceaseless weighing and measuring of past occasions that torments my restless brain, my fancy is eternally endeavouring to body forth what would have come to me in life had I by some fortuitous freak of fortune been debarred for fulfilling my duties at St. Mary's Chûrch one Sunday evening, some six weeks after my return to Town. Would I have wedded

Nan and escaped the ugly influence that even as a child had so pitilessly marred my life? Would she be near me now? I cry aloud in fruitless questioning, though all the while aware that no answer can reach me, and that even if it could, my life lies past patching. I am no believer in premonitions, dreams, and the follies with which old wives would fain claim powers of divination, yet I maintain that I woke the morning of the day on which Fate waylaid me with such unkindly intent, with a depressing prescience of evil. I ascribed it at the time to my generous potations of the night before, for I had enjoyed a festive end to my day of toil at the "Cheshire Cheese" in Russell Street, and, excited by the gay examples around me, had mixed my liquors somewhat freely.

On the night to which I refer a wave of devotion had apparently actuated half London to its undoing, or possibly the expected advent of a renowned preacher was the cause of the serried ranks of worshippers that I noticed as I came up the aisle. Suffice it to say that the church was filled to the uttermost limit, an unusual number of men preponderating in the assembly. The service was half way through

when I imagined that I detected a faint smell of burning; it was so slight that for a moment I imagined myself mistaken, but in the passing of an instant I sniffed it stronger and rose from my knees, intending to tell the officiating priest that the people be warned and advised to leave the church quietly, without panic. But even as I moved a woman's voice, sharp with fear, clave across the parson's drone, crying, "*Fire!*" and before the note of her warning had died to silence there ensued a hideous stampede. Men, women and children rushed helter-skelter to the door, and as they rushed a blue tongue of flame crept from behind the altar and a monstrous volume of smoke belched forth. Then happened a scene, the bare remembrance of which nauseates me; the weak were trampled underfoot by the strong, and the high-pitched shrieks of women and children mingled with the curses of men, while with a celerity I had hardly deemed possible the fire gained ground, leaping in scarlet forks through the heavy clouds of smoke. The crackling of wood added to the turmoil, and I mind noting a loosened beam and striving to drag a woman from beneath it, but she was mad with fear and waited shrieking for her husband till the beam crashed down on to

her head, and she lay in a crimson pool of blood with the gray matter of her brain oozing from out the cracked skull. God! Such a scene might Dante have haply depicted at the very heart of hell. Now and again the bewildered sob of a babe would sound, and once I heard a shrill cry of "Mother, I burn," followed by a scream; and that voice was heard no more. Myself, I made a fight for life, though hardly hoping to escape. I was beaten back at every step and a deadly faintness began to grow on me, numbing my endeavour, while the stink of burning flesh filled me with a deadly sickness, and being both undersized and weakly I had hardly a chance where many stronger than I lay stark and suffocated. I had indeed given up all hope, when a strong arm lifted me and I was raised above the crowd. "Take heart, Punchinello," said a mocking voice that struck me with a curious familiarity, and then I fainted and knew no more.

My eyes opened on an environment of such luxury that I thought I must be dreaming. The delicate-tinted walls were hung with rare pieces of tapestry and curious carven brackets on which bowls of roses reposed. I noted by these some pictures placed in the happiest light

in the room, and as my scattered wits came back to me, and I realized that I was in the land of realities, my amazement increased. There was a toilet table near me covered with silver-backed brushes and hand mirrors and fantastic little boxes for the holding of powder and cosmetics. I had thought I had strolled into a lady's chamber had it not been for a pair of breeches tossed over a chair. The sheets of the bed on which I lay were of the finest, and the pillows fringed with lace. Indubitably a lady's chamber—yet those breeches? My gratitude forbade a slanderous thought, still I could not forbear harbouring certain suspicions regarding the owner of my present residence. Suspicions I admit that in no wise alloyed my felicity, and I was on the point of dozing again when I heard a voice of familiar intonation. "Punchinello," it said softly, "how goes it?" I looked up, and there emerged from behind the curtains a very Adonis. Straight and tall as a man should be, with clear-cut, impassive features, and dressed in the very height of fashion, reaching indeed, in his adornments, a finery that touched foppishness. There was something intimate to me in his face and voice; his presence stirred the mists of memory, and slowly the shadows lifted

and a picture rose before me. A fair orchard in which two children stood—the one as splendid a specimen of God's handiwork as the world could offer, the other a miserable stunted boy. They hurried through the grasses and stood by a patch of water that glistened like a silver shield in the garish sunlight, throwing back a faithful reflection of the drooping branches that shadowed it. It seemed to me in the shifting panorama of my vision that the elder lad mocked the younger, who looked at him bewildered, fearing he knew not what. Then the handsome boy ran away, vaulted over a stile and raced gaily with the foal that frolicked in the field, and the child at the water's edge stared into the pond and tugged vigorously at his blouse the while. Then he looked up into the laughing skies with a tiny ashen face and great frightened eyes and as suddenly turned again to his flickering reflection. I watched him fascinated. Who had said "Punchinello"? In a moment he would turn and fly to the house. Ah, he ran! "Punchinello! Punchinello!" Who had said it? I groped vainly. Then suddenly through the fog of reminiscence—Cosmo Granby. As my sick brain grasped understanding, I voiced the word. "Cosmo!" said I with a

catch in my breath, looking up at the handsome debonair face. "Cosmo!"

"The same at your service," said he, "and now how goes it, Master Anthony? There is something left of you besides cinder, I see." He flung himself into a chair and regarded me with interest. "Had it not been for a woman's whim, methinks you had bidden this vale of tears a long farewell. Nothing would suit Mistress Letty last night but to go and hear this Parson Sharpe, who has the repute of making penitents by the gross by his dexterous balancing of the joys of Heaven against the penalties of Hell; and where Mistress Letty goes, I follow," he went on, evidently joying in this opportunity of making me intimate with his fashionable amours.

"What happened to her?" I asked, curious to know how it had chanced that he had found opportunity to succour more than one from out that Gehenna of the dying and dead.

His laugh filled the room with a jocund roar. "Hardly had the service fairly opened when Letty was weary and panting to leave. The devil takes care of his own! She was in a nasty mood," he added reflectively, "and turned on me like a wild cat, when I offered to accom-

pany her, saying that she desired no company but her own. She was all smiles and wiles when she entered the church; but there is no counting on a woman's mood," he flung out—an opinion I cordially endorsed, which seemed to entertain him monstrously.

"Ha, ha, Tony!" he chuckled, "you too? I had not believed it possible." I winced under his gaze. "But there, so long as a man be a man, no matter what, they are bound to upset his peace."

"You remained to pray, or to give your soul a chance of salvation through Sharpe?" I asked, desiring to divert his thoughts.

"Well, no," he said with a fine candour, "I remained because I had caught sight of you, Tony, and thought to have speech with you later. And then this affair happened and I made shift for auld lang syne to lend a helping hand—no more, no less." He spoke with a sort of vexed shame—that shame often noticed in brave men when forced to speak of their own deeds. And Cosmo, though it hurts me to speak well of him in any way, was strong in physical courage, being in no wise deterred but rather excited by the thought of danger.

For the moment my heart warmed to him, for after all, however lightly he phrased it, he had risked his life to save mine, and I put my hand out and would have grasped his, but he turned away impatiently as I broke into thanks, and cut across my words with questions as to what I would eat and if I cared to rise. He had sent for no physician, he said, having scant faith in them, and knowing I had suffered no burns.

Indeed, I was little the worse save for a recurring weakness and giddiness, the result of the shock I had sustained, and a feeling of nausea that seized me when I thought of the hideous sights I had witnessed.

Thanks to his steel nerves, Cosmo seemed not in the slightest degree incommoded by the ghastly experiences through which he had passed. He dismissed it from his mind as summarily as he dismissed an inconvenient visitor, wrinkling his nose and shaking his head distastefully if I referred to them.

"An unsavoury subject," he flung at me that evening, regarding me, as I could not escape noting, with the well-bred aversion of one who avoided all indelicate mention in fashionable circles and was quick to reprove a transgression

of the unwritten code. My reference, considering all things, was not perhaps particularly fortunate, for when I made it Granby's rooms were filled with the gay blades of his acquaintance who had dropped in, and to whom he introduced me in most cavalier fashion as a Lilliputian who had escaped from his native land. At this time men were holding their sides at Dean Swift's bitter wit, and *Gulliver's Travels* was the book of the hour, so Granby's joke met with instant response. God! how I hated him when he mocked me thus, and none the less that I knew his merriment was devoid of malice, and that I owed him the debt of my life.

Perhaps it was in part to whip my memory to necessary gratitude that I cut across their gay speech of women and assignations, the toast called over brimming cups, the talk that under cover of excited disputation regarding the tumult in Ireland whispered that the "white cockade" was dear to many who professed Hanoverian sympathies and that they carried their heads carefully, and spoke of the conflagration of the day before. One, I remember him well, put his handkerchief to his nose and looked at me more in sorrow than in anger.

"Sh—," said a second, and Granby threw me an annoyed glance.

" This is not a charnel house," said he.

I looked at them and envied the address with which they turned their backs on death and all unpleasantness, indeed suffering me in their midst with something of difficulty owing to my misshapen form. One surveyed me through his glass. " Passing strange," sighed he, " that fair genius should inhabit so poor a shell."

When I took my leave Granby was well in his cups.

" Adieu, Punchinello," he hiccoughed with infinite difficulty, stuttering heavily in his speech. He was playing cards, and as he spoke he flung a knave on the baize and looked at it with angry eyes. " No luck to-night," he maundered, and suddenly rose and staggering to my side, laid his fingers on my hump. The touch burns me now. " It brings luck, they say," he grinned.

How I got away I do not know. I wandered through London till the break of morning, stumbling weakly in my sickness, yet with strength to curse him. And he had saved my life, which fact I cursed also. Indeed, I termed it cursing, but it was blessing compared to the

words that fill my mouth when his image crosses me to-day. Then I cursed him for one—now my maledictions are for two lives undone. Then it was but the smart of an outraged nature—now that accident lies at his door.

XI

I HAVE always held that Cosmo's saving of my life in the terrible fire at St. Mary's was the original cause of all my miseries; for by this act, he knitted up again the threads of a severed friendship and made it impossible for me to reject his overtures. Indeed, my mother, when she heard of his succouring me, forgave him all the past, and wrote him the warmest, most cordial letters, praying him to visit our home, that she might be enabled to thank him in person, and eulogising his conduct to the skies. I, to my shame be it told, still hated him with unabated fervour, and felt I had rather died the tortured death from which he had carried me at so great a risk, than be in his debt.

St. Mary's being but a charred block of buildings, I was constrained at this time to make holiday until I found another post, and was indeed not loth, for my health still suffered from the heavy strain lately put upon it, and

also because I was more free to engage in composition. On my return home I noted a piteous change in my mother, which she sought to hide with artifices that had not deceived an infant, denying that aught serious ailed her and declining to speak of any health but mine.

I straightly questioned my sister regarding her, but she deemed me fanciful, her own eyes being blinded by the constant view of my mother, so that the minor symptoms of sickness that fretted me went unperceived.

Nan had gone to Town, I learned, to taste life under the auspices of the Lady Agatha, and my mother seemed somewhat troubled on her count. "According to Lady Agatha," she said bitterly to me, "it seems as if a man needed but a pedigree at his back and a generous sum at the bank, to make an ideal husband. She talked of mating her with the Viscount Lothair—the man might be her grandsire. My poor little Nan!"

I hated to hear this matrimonial talk regarding my cousin, although I confidently assured myself that I had no touch of love in my heart for her or any other woman, having been cured of these foolish follies by the drastic measures of Mistress Marjory. I

writhed in remembrance of her sneer and yet cherished the memory, feeling that my best safeguard in the future lay in the careful cherishing of this word. So sought I to spare myself, poor fool, another such bitterness.

It smacks of meanness, I confess, yet I must write that it was gall to me to listen to my mother's kind words, praising Cosmo, and to know that she regretted her past enmity towards him. Mistress Granby had kept up an intermittent intercourse with my mother till her death, but I had never seen him since the episode of my childhood till that unfortunate day in the burning church. My mother never mentioned his name, being full of wisdom and knowing that silence accelerates forgetfulness; but I had seen her face change when by some chance the lad's name was spoken, and knew how strongly the old rancour still flourished. Now all was changed: she lacked words fair enough with which to deck his name, and was eternally praying me to bring him to her that she might speak her thanks in person. Thanks be to God! Mistress Granby was no longer among the living, or I believe my mother had insisted on her eternal company in order to pour her Te Deum into her ears.

The days glided on, seeming curiously restful to me after my sojourn in Town, where time was flecked with incident and there was ever the scandal of the hour; but our peace was not for long.

One morning I found my mother much troubled by the receipt of a missive from the Lady Agatha in which Mistress Nancy's peccadilloes were set forth at a generous length. My cousin had, it appeared, wasted no time before entering into her aunt's bad graces, where she was apparently disporting herself, undismayed by consequences—so at least wrote the godmother. The letter lies at my hand, almost as magnificent in its fine violet caligraphy and gilded coronet and crest as its sender. It began with long-winded inquiries touching my mother's health which I will not transcribe, extracting only the lines relating to my cousin's misdemeanours, which were indeed the body of the letter.

"I write to you," began this part, "in dire distress regarding my god-daughter, who has most grievously disappointed me by her monstrous behaviour. I do not refer to her ignorance of the usages of polite society nor to her familiar manners regarding myself, which border

on disrespect. These things I would gladly pass, knowing the manifold disadvantages that attended her youth, but I write of graver matters, viz., what the rigour of the truth compels me to define as an immodest behaviour towards the sterner sex. She treats men—young and old indifferently—with a careless graciousness that I have never before seen in her rank of life. When a youth takes her fancy, she is all smiles and sweetness, caring not one jot for his position; indeed, I sometimes think she particularly affects the Bohemians and artists which fringe society. On the other hand she treats Viscount Lothair—you may remember my hopes regarding this gentleman—with a carelessness that trenches on indifference. He is attracted by her—God wots why—and I know by a little cautious manœuvring and moderate exercise of diplomacy, he could be brought to the asking of her in marriage; but my damsel lifts her nose in the air and screams with laughter when I speak of it. Now I must warn you that in the event of his asking her in marriage and meeting with a refusal, I shall return my thankless ward to you straightway. I shall have done my best to settle her in life, and if she prefers to frustrate her own salvation,

on her own head be the consequence." Here the letter drifted off to general gossip: a reference to the marked change in women's headgear and an allusion to the importation of a new silk. It was a formal letter as was natural, considering the slightness of our acquaintance with the correspondent, but there was a genuine note of anger in it touching Mistress Nancy; and again beneath the signature—written in post-scriptum, as is the inevitable habit of women—lay the gist of the letter, gathered into a pregnant phrase. "If Nancy declines Lothair's offer, I send her home."

Now I with unpardonable egoism was rejoiced at this possibility. My heart, school it as I might, rebelled at the thought of Nan belonging to another, and there was to me something horribly repulsive in the thought of her being sold—for I cannot dignify such marriages by a higher name, and see little difference between the woman who so gives herself and the prostitute who takes her wage.

Five days later following this letter came another from the same source, breathing fire and fury. "He has asked her hand" (I take sentences from here and there, the communication itself being too long to transcribe), "and

has been refused—yes, refused, and that most impudently: Nancy feigning to think that he wished to adopt her, and shrieking with laughter (so Lothair tells me) when she mastered the nature of his request. I send her back to you at your earliest convenience, and wish you joy of the baggage," etc., etc. My mother could not keep from smiling when she read this precious paper; even the sedate Cecily looked conscious, while her eyes darkened and I could see that she was thinking of a straight youth, no other than little Reuben, who had grown to man's estate and was for ever hanging on her skirts. He was a prosperous man, and his years passed hers by five, which is a good majority for a man to hold over his wife.

"Poor Nan!" said my mother at last; and her eyes dwelt on her daughter with a new gladness, as if she was more sharply aware by this contrast of fortunes of Cecily's good fate in having fallen to the taste of a meet mate.

"She was never a respecter of persons," said my sister with a giggle. Nan's impertinences had always amused her vastly; neither of us heeded her. My mother's eyes had waited a moment on me, and then her glance had drifted away. I struggled to decipher its meaning.

Half puzzled, half wistful, glad with a felicity that is afraid to rejoice, fearful as one who has not abandoned hope, her eyes waited on me momentarily, almost as if they conveyed a warning.

"I fear she will regret so early a return," went on Cecily, who could always prattle placidly, indifferent as to the compliment of attention. "She has been so restless latterly, always panting for some fresh diversion, so starved for amusement as to be constrained to study," and she turned to me gaily. "I pray the harpsichord be none the worse," said she. "She practised most diligently—poor Nan"; she pronounced the closing words with infinite compassion. My sister had an honest terror of all musical exercise.

"I have noticed no harm," said I, wondering still at my mother, who had returned to her letter, and was re-perusing it with rapt attention.

When Cecily left us, as she shortly did, I was so pricked by curiosity as to question her; but she rose laughing from her seat and would tell me nothing, mocking at my fancifulness. By the light of further events I read that glance, and knew what she by aid of woman's wit foresaw. If aught could comfort me for her loss,

it would be the knowledge that by her death she was spared the horror of the final tragedy.

Not a week had passed when another letter arrived from the Lady Agatha, telling us that her god-daughter was on the eve of quitting her mansion. "She returns to you forthwith," wrote Milady in a tremulous hand, eloquent of the mighty passion that animated her. "I have done with the ungrateful hussy!" "Ungrateful," I may mention, was heavily scored with ink, that the opprobrious adjective might lose no jot of its unkind significance.

My cousin arrived two days after this missive, and appeared in no wise dejected by the abrupt closing of her gaieties. She had gathered in her brief absence a marvellous assortment of tricks and fashions, and gave me the tips of her fingers, when I greeted her, with an ineffable air. She had likewise changed the manner of her walk, and truly peacocked, if I may coin a verb, in her smart silks and satins; but she was prettier than ever and wore her affectations with the sweetest grace. I can write sanely now of this time, and would love to dwell on it, stimulating my memory by dry statement in black and white, of what she wore and what she said; her merest trivialities of speech lie

burned in my heart, each nonchalant phrase dear as when spoken by her lips, each ripple of her laughter greedily guarded from oblivion. But I am old, and the decay of years is crumbling the citadel of my memory; my treasures I feel are slipping away as golden coins may slip through lax fingers of weakness. There is no time to write all, so, true to the plan I contemplated when beginning this chronicle, and from which I have most grievously lapsed, I will strive to confine myself to the incidents from which my life lay strung. I could laugh when I think of my other life that will go forth to the world when I lie dead. It has been most carefully written by an erudite biographer, and tells of my successes and failures, and how, aided by an indomitable will, I reached the highest rung of success: it tells of jealousies, and favours, and of the rapturous applause that greeted the first public performance of the oratorio that I hold the crown of my life's work. There is no hint of that affair in which Mistress Marjory so practically proclaimed that all is fair in love and war—nothing of the ridiculous fiasco of my first flight into public favour. There is indeed a polite reference to the—accident, and the cloud of grief that marred

my youth. I chuckled as I read it, and the faces of those around me waxed anxious, and although silence reigned I knew that they were thinking—"he is mad."

But I am not mad—quite the contrary. My finest work has been done since that accident; my eminent biographer proves it past doubt in that beautiful book which is to go forth to the world when the earth is over me. I laughed to myself when I read it: he is so complacently satisfied with his dreary record, not witting that I am writing my life too, my own inmost personal life, a "king of shreds and patches," and as far removed from that stout profitable personal existence that he fondly imagines represents my span on earth, as aught can be. With all his learning he has missed the man. He prattles comfortably of how at the zenith of my success, when thousands were shouting their throats hoarse to do me honour at the great annual festival in H——, I dropped down in a dead faint, "overcome," he ponderously explains, "by the widespread recognition of his genius." I jeer—yet how should he know, poor fool, that I cared not one jot for their shoutings and clappings, but that my senses left me owing to the similarity of a maid who

sat in the audience to one who was sleeping sound beneath the daisies. Just the line of a profile, a dark curly head, and by some refined torture of fortune, a scarlet gown. She flung a pert word at a man near her as I stared, and smiled—it was Nan herself—that quick parting and closing of the lips. I do not know what happened next. My biographer is no doubt an excellent authority. Let it stand: "The applause of such an audience was no doubt too potent for the composer, coming as it did after arduous mental toil." Let it stand—what matter? We know better, you and I, sweetheart. "Nan! Nan! Nan!" I cry aloud, and there is no answer. Shall it be so at the very end, my darling? To some, as a saving anodyne, is given belief in another world, where once again they shall stand face to face with all they hold most dear. I know that in my foulness, even if such a place exist and not be a mere mirage evolved by the passionate desire of some lonely heart, I could not enter it. Yet, if I believed that somewhere Nan lived again, and that by long cycles of torment spent in atonement God in His mercy might grant me a moment's vision of her, I should be the happier. But my faith wavers and I am afraid

to die, for my dying means the blotting out of all memories, the final effacement of that shadowy figure that haunts me in the garish days. I am afraid—afraid—and death is coming very near.

When I read over these last incoherent lines, treading so closely on my expressed intention to write lucidly the remaining little that remains of my life, I feel indeed that I am very old. Yet it is not worth erasing, and indeed if a man may not write as he likes regarding his own life, where shall the liberty of the subject enter? Nathless I must make an end of my vapourings and tell my tale lucidly, for now begins the time that held the very salt of my life. Up to this period, barring my musical life, which I have practically left to my good biographer, there has been little to relate. After this time there are many years crammed with striving ambition. Let all broken hearts take "work" for a cement—it covers the cracks in a measure, if a man does not look too close. These years may interest the amiable public: they seem of no import to the man who lived them, besides—there is always the biographer.

But there is a time between Nancy's return

and an—accident which I would fain write clearly, so that by definite statement I may know something of relief. Yet I doubt my hand be nerved sufficiently, though what I would be telling lies so far behind.

XII

ANALYSE as I may, dissecting every hour with merciless exactitude, I cannot place the moment when the divine possibility that Nan loved me first entered into my life. It may have been a conviction born of my hot desire; for so does a great hope beget a happy certainty, holding that by its very force it must cleave through all obstacles to the golden goal, or more likely—to descend from these heights of speech—the swollen vanity that ever characterised me and which at that time was receiving such gracious nourishment from the world, may have encouraged the fair thought that she was not averse to me. It matters not. Slowly, surely through the sad autumn-tide this belief held me faster and filled my days with light—yet I spoke no word. I was still living at home, working hard in an enforced abstinence from public employment, and Nancy came to be part and parcel of my daily life. My mother, who, in spite of

her gallant fight to prove the contrary, was patently passing with the year, watched us with the dying eyes that see so clearly, and as the days fled I could see the question more and more clearly signalised in her face as to the end of this silent wooing.

Now I must go softly and pick my words with care, in order that my word-pictures prove successful and the mirror of my memory flash the past faithfully.

We sat together, Nan and I, in the music-room that I had made peculiarly my own. The first touch of winter was on us, and without the world lay white and frostbound, but within the great logs lay piled high on the hearth, making a glowing oasis in the dusky shadows and flinging warm lights on the oaken panelling.

Nancy sat on a low seat before the fire, and the music of her voice filled the room. She was in a mocking humour, and was jeering at her estimable godparent and her choice of swain. "Yet," she surprisingly flung at me, "I sometimes wish I had married him. I should have been envied by many," said she.

"The compensation seems to be inadequate," I observed.

"He had his points," said she perversely. "He knew what he wanted and feared not to ask. 'Will you be my wife?' said he. I like a man like that." And then she fell to apparent musing, and stared into the ruddy hollows of the logs.

"He approached seventy, and could not lay his hand on a clean five minutes of his life," I retorted.

"I never heard of his being of vicious nature when an infant," she remarked. "He *may* have ogled his nurse."

I said no more, and Mistress Nan shortly resumed: "It is one of the many advantages of being a man—being—er—" (I had never known her hesitate before)—"able to ask whom you will in marriage. A fat satyr may ask me, but I may not venture an offer—no, not to the most suitable," and she sighed profoundly.

Now here my heart gave a great leap—paused—and then fell to a most agitated trotting.

"I should word it more adroitly than he, I fancy," she prattled, with her back to me. "'Nan, will you be my wife?' he said, never doubting an affirmative. How should I say?" The hope that by its very magnitude trenched

on fear grew stronger in my heart. I do not know why I delayed, perhaps reluctance to break the pretty string of her words, and Nan meandered on: "I should say—had I the right to voice my preference—I should say—I should say——"

Now I deliberately held my peace, savouring beforehand the delight of the moment when she should whisper, "Anthony," while great waves of golden firelight leapt and fell. "I do not know what I should say," quoth she discontentedly; "it is not so easy, after all."

Then I took my courage in both hands and flung myself on my knees before her, crying out all that had been locked in my heart for so long, mixed with bitter recognition of my physical defect. I was half-choked with excitement, and the words came with difficulty, yet she understood and mocked me through the tears that wet her eyes.

"It is ill work forcing a maid to such forwardness, Anthony. I was on the verge of a proposal, and it is not leap-year that I know." Her laugh went chiming through the room as a peal of silver bells; the logs crackled gaily, flinging out a shower of sparks. "For better for worse," said she, with lips pressed to mine;

"till death us do part." And so we were betrothed.

Later we went without for a moment and looked up at the jewelled skies glittering with stars, and Nan made an obeisance to the moon. "For luck," she explained. I mind that, as she passed again within the house, I noted that she had left the print of her foot on the lightly fallen snow, and that I stooped and kissed it. It is a curious emotion—love. "Strong, perhaps dangerous," as old Ooterwint warned me—good for other things than an argument on which to hang an anthem. Were there ghosts abroad that night that the sombre chanting of the choir came to me through the shadows of the night? "*For jealousy is cruel as the grave—as the grave.*" The pines sobbed it, and the pitiless words went sighing over the Downs—"*as the grave—cruel as the grave.*" I shook off the remembrance and followed Nan within the house, while the thought of what the day had brought me sang as a jubilant psalm in my brain.

* * * * *

For a few weeks it seemed as if this happy issue strengthened my mother's hold on life. She was very anxious that we should be wed

without delay, and somewhat hurried us over the *Vorspiel* of our marriage, in which Nan and I had willingly dallied. But my mother would have us fix the day that made us man and wife; crying that she feared the delay that might hold her death. So by her wish we were quietly married one morning in the little church that had witnessed the scene of my discomfiture. I remember with distinctness my mother speaking with me privately that morning in her bedchamber. She sent for me early and gave me her blessing, and then spoke a word of warning. "Be not over-quick to judge, Tony, nor over-quick to despair; especially guard against this latter, for of all things that cut us most completely off from God despair stands first; and, Anthony"—here she waited, and by a twist of fancy I was again a puzzled child watching her face, not knowing what her sad eyes portended—"Nan is young, very young, and fairer than the common run of women. She will get admiration in plenty, perhaps be greedy of it. Be not jealous, Tony; jealousy is a foul thing, born often of a great love, and pitiless beyond all things."

"She loves me," I said, half hurt.

"Yes, yes." She kissed me on the mouth.

"I would not cloud your marriage morn, but I would warn you, Tony. If ever a thought comes to you that your Nan is slipping from you for love of a goodlier man," her sweet voice took all sting from the words, "cast that thought from you. For so most surely will the devil try to enter." And then she kissed me again and spoke lightly of other things, as if relieved to have ended an onerous task.

XIII

THE tale of the following three months, suitably written, should be spelled in letters of gold, so full, so perfect, were these days of bliss. Perhaps the gods grew jealous that a mortal should enjoy a felicity that matched their own, and let me savour these hours that in the gray loneliness of the future they should serve to accentuate my loss. Sometimes, in my black hours, when I curse my fate and sob in weak self-pity over my wasted life, these gay days mock me till I feel it were almost better to have missed them. Three months — three little months of a gladness, at the thought of which I hold my breath in pain—when I would forget, they mock me, a lustrous oasis in the desolate past — yet in truth I know, had I the choice, my remembrance should not be ravished of them.

Methinks on Olympus the gods held their sides with laughter when the missive from Cosmo Granby arrived, holding an intimation to

the effect that circumstances at last enabled him to accept my mother's kind invitation, and that he proposed posting to us the following week. My mother broke into gratulatory ejaculations, thanking Heaven that she should see her son's saviour before she died. Thanking Heaven!—I could laugh now had I but leisure, but I must hurry—hurry—for Azrael tarries for no man's convenience, and I have yet much to write. Granby wrote most civilly, hoping that I had recovered from the effects of the fire from which he had had the good fortune to rescue me. He had heard that I had married a lady of exquisite beauty (when I read this sentence I could not but smile sardonically, till checked by my mother's fretted gaze)—again he prayed I had sustained no ill effects. At this point my mother pressed the paper to her lips, and her eyes grew tenderly grateful. "You owe him your life, Tony," said she; and I—may I be forgiven!—stamped for rage.

The New Year had been born six weeks when he came. It was a sparkling day, with a turquoise sky blown clear of any film of cloud; the bare tracery of the stripped boughs flashed with the glitter of frost, in the roads the pools were sheeted with thin ice. He arrived in the early

afternoon, and as he stepped into the room where we sat awaiting his arrival, it seemed as if he brought with him a hint of the bracing invigoration without. He was looking in excellent health and spirits, and as he entered with the buoyant careless grace that characterized him, he presented, even to my jaundiced eyes, the figure of a very goodly man. Puerile though I felt it, I could not help contrasting his fine vitality, that appeared to luxuriate in this bitter weather, and my own poor health, that hardly allowed me to leave the house in these sharp days. Nan had lately come in, and stood by the great stove with her furs loosened round her throat, and her delicate face whipped by the keen air without to a brilliant rose. My mother lay on her couch, her nerves strained to listen. She was the first to hear his coming, and flung us the intimation. The next moment he was with us, and my mother was thanking him through her tears for the gift of my life. He listened to her courteously enough, greeting me the while; but I could see that his eyes had fastened themselves on my wife, and the sharp pain that I was to know so intimately pierced my heart.

His glance puzzled me — through its ad-

miration, as he bowed to her, I fancied I detected an uncertain recognition. In her eyes, too, there was a bewilderment, as if she were puzzled by a strange likeness. Then in a moment the cloud lifted from his face and he smiled delightedly. "Little Nan," said he, coming forward with outstretched hands, as one who meets an old acquaintance, "Nan Dallas," said he, using her maiden name, which was naturally the same as my own surname.

"Master Granby?" she said sedately; "nay, Jasper Ruthven—an unexpected pleasure," and then joined my mother in lauding his noble act in St. Mary's Church, while I, the saved, and therefore the cause of all this adulation, sat by morose, and feeling incapable of more than a conventional civility.

When the tumult of gratitude had in some measure subsided, I learned the history of this acquaintance.

Cosmo, it appears, when travelling abroad, had met my uncle, and on his occasional visits to his lodgings had seen Nancy, who was then, he kindly informed me later, one of the sweetest buds of womanhood he had ever had the delight of knowing. He had changed his name before going abroad, which accounted for my wife not

recognising an old friend in the hero of my adventure; he gave me no reason for this dubious proceeding, but I learned later, through a trustworthy authority, that less choice than expediency had advised travel.

From the first he made no endeavour to hide his great admiration for my wife. He would sit—his eyes fastened on her, with an intentness for which I could have struck him—gloating on her beauty; his gaze glued o' nights to the white curve of her naked neck. And I had to sit silent and watch him till, nerved by the mesmeric force of his gaze, Nan would lift her eyes, wide wells of light, and fling him a word or smile. "She will be given much admiration." The sage words of my mother's homily on my marriage morn beat in my brain, needing not her warning eyes that would be fixed on me sometimes when I turned from watching the pair with a fear in them that trembled into panic. "He saved my life! he saved my life!" I would repeat this formula to myself as a panacea when I felt the rising passion mastering me, striving to strike sparks from a dead emotion that refused to be quickened. At this time I held Nan as guileless of any evil intent as I hold her now, when it is too late for any

human praise or blame to touch her. Truly she gave him look for look and smile for smile, and to my jealous eyes adorned herself more carefully to pleasure him; but in these early days my maniacal obsession was not such as to utterly pervert my judgment, and I valued her wanton ways truly, seeing in them nothing more nor less than the flattered delight of a beautiful woman revelling in the first force of her beauty.

By a grotesque accident *I* was his trump-card. When Nan would note, with the flawless intuition of a keen-witted woman, what was passing in my mind and accord him a chilly shoulder, cleverly enough avoiding all personal suggestion, he would turn her thoughts to the augmentation of my weakness, thereby unerringly indicating the cause. From that for her thoughts to fly to his gallant part so lately played, took but the space of a moment, and where she had showed an indifferent attention she became all smiles and sweet graciousness, seeing in the over-bold gallant her Tony's deliverer. As I sat silent over my writing I could see his game well enough, and knew the value of his cards as well as he. He was a careful player, not foolishly rash, and played to win; nor was he tempted by adverse success to risk his highest

card too soon in the deal. If he had a fault, it was his indifference to the onlooker whom we know proverbially sees the most handsome part of the game. But he had always despised me "Indeed, a very Punchinello!" These phrases live everlastingly in the brain when kind words are forgotten, and I had always an excellent memory for a slight.

As the days passed his familiarities increased, and I would wonder at the breaking of each day whether my patience would endure to night. Only my sense of indebtedness—for, after all, he had risked his life for mine—stayed my speech.

Once I was within an ace of losing my control. Nan had caught something of a chill, and was confined to the house, and Granby had apparently lost all zest for exercise and air, and hardly left her, striving always, as he had it, to lighten my wife's imprisonment.

One afternoon he left us for a little, and Nan and I were alone in the parlour.

She was in a curious moody humour, and spoke with an irritability foreign to her. I myself was in not too gay a temper, and we needed but an excuse to put our smouldering vexedness into words.

"How dull it is!" said Nan, with both arms above her pretty head and opening her red lips into a very heigh-ho of weariness.

"He will soon be back," I said unpleasantly.

"Who?" said she artlessly enough.

"Your admirer," I grunted.

She looked at me, and the temper gathered in her face.

"The saints be praised!" She gave another yawn enough to tear her mouth apart, and then snoozled her head into the cushions of her couch and made as though she would sleep.

This was more than flesh and blood could bear, and I plumped myself upon the end of her seat and made ready for war. "Nancy," I said, appreciating the added dignity of the second syllable, "I would speak with you."

"Speak," she flung at me in a tone of extremest weariness.

My head swims when I would write of this time. To think that the awful tragedy opened with a man's coarse stare—with these trivial words! There should have been a graver note; but no, I remember well enough our ridiculous falling out. Had we known, my sweetheart, had we known! But we had no thought of what the future held. I was sore and jealous indeed,

but my wrath was all centred on Granby, and she—what was she thinking when she turned her head away and bade me speak? How best to tease—I would wager my soul. Had we known! But we did not know, and squabbled as two children.

"It is regarding Granby," I said sharply; "you appear to find favour in his eyes."

"His eyes are such a pretty blue," she returned, with her face in the cushion, "he finds favour in mine."

"He insults you by his open admiration," I went on. "You—you do not encourage him, Nan," I paused, longing to urge her to rebuff him, yet fearing to banish her innocence.

She looked at me placidly and sat up straightly on her sofa. "I put my arm round his neck—so," said she, suiting the action to the word; "my hands meet his—so; then I put my lips to his cheek—so; and I say: 'Anthony, how great an owl art thou!'" And she laughed outright. "Jealous!" she mocked. "Fie—for shame!"

"I am not jealous," I said, semi-appeased. "Nan, shall we give him a hint to go?"

She shrugged her shoulders and looked away. "He saved your life," she said. I knew she would.

"Damnation!" said I. "Had I as many lives as a cat and he had saved them all, it would not pardon his present behaviour."

She looked at me with disfavour. "Othello was an unpleasant character," she said unexpectedly; "jealousy is the meanest of vices."

"At the worst there is always the pillow," I said in bitter jest, with my mind on Othello and my eye on the cushion. And here she burst into a storm of tears, and I could only retract and apologize, and proclaim her a very incarnation of the proprieties, a past-mistress in the art of careful behaviour, till she was pleased to be comforted.

Peace was hardly assured and I was still humiliating myself before my beloved, when Cosmo returned from his walk, and marched into the parlour with the jubilant, colours-flying air that I so resented. A morbid mind will evolve monstrous emotions with the utmost facility. I cannot explain it, but it seemed to me that in Cosmo's presence I grew more stunted and wizened, that such poor vitality as I owned was sucked out by him to the enriching of his magnificent physique. Vampires are held part of the legendary lore that is builded by weak superstitious minds, yet for all my

boasted scepticism of such follies, they peopled my mind in Granby's presence. He was so gloriously, magnificently alive. As he came towards Nan with a little bunch of newly-plucked violets in his hand, I could not but admire him for all my hatred.

He greeted Nan with a low obeisance. "Spring is coming," he said, "the earth is stirring—her first offering," and he strove to push the violets into the girdle of her gown.

When I saw his hands fingering her body, and she smiling and not repulsing him, but treating him with an added kindness as if to punish my late temper, a great surge of passion rose up in my heart, rendering me speechless. I could only stare at the pair, noting how well they matched each other as they stood side by side, his fair head inclined towards her dusky curls: he striving to fasten the flowers in her band, she pushing him away with a coquettish feint of resistance. I do not know what would have happened. A scarlet veil was before my eyes and my hands were twitching; I could fancy them pressing on his strong throat, pressing, pressing till the eyes started and the head hung helpless. My fancy revelled in this ghastly picture. I must do it soon, I felt, before

the old influence began to work, and my blood ran as water in my veins.

I do not know what would have passed, but at this moment there was a scuffle in the room over us in which my mother slept, and a woman shrieked. Nan was out of the room and half-way up the stairs in a moment, and I followed her with such speed as I could muster, mechanically apologising to Granby as I brushed past him.

The scene that met my eyes as I pushed open the door of my mother's bedchamber, cooled my passion. I forgot my anger, for I saw death clearly written in my dear one's face. She lay fighting for breath in her maid's arms, her features twisted with pain, the great drops of sweat standing on her brow.

When the spasm was passed, she turned her eyes on me, and made a movement with her lips as if she would speak, and then turned to the others making as if she wished them away. I had been used to her attacks and took her woman's place without delay, motioning to the others to fall back. "Tony," she breathed through her white lips, each word wrenched from her in extremest agony, "jealousy—cruel as the grave—beware!" The pain seized her

again, till we who loved her, tortured by the sight of her agony, wished her dead. Once, as it partially subsided, I fancied she fought again for words. Her eyes indeed reached the eloquence of articulate appeal. And then with a great sob her soul went forth.

XIV

HAD my mother lived, I sometimes think, with that love common to us all of crediting unhappy circumstance with events long since decreed by Fate, I had not reached the extremity I did; but her dying robbed me of a saving influence, and the devils I harboured worked their will unchecked.

Primarily, out of the sad evil of her dying a temporary good ensued, inasmuch as decorous usage rendered Granby's departure from the house of mourning imperative; and, in my brutal egoism, the knowledge that death had hurried his going in measure mitigated my grief at my dear one's loss.

Spring was upon us in all its glory, the meadows were gay with cuckoo flowers and cowslips, when one morning I noted a letter addressed to Nancy, in Granby's hand, lying in the vestibule. I recognised the optimistic upstart of his fist, his grandiloquent capitals, his vain-glorious crest. A familiar scent arose from

the missive. I had smelled it before, arising from the packet in which he had written to my mother apprising her of his approaching arrival.

It must be confessed that I fingered it somewhat over-carefully, studying it with an interest that infringed the code of honour which protects the correspondence of another. I would have given much to have broken the seal, but some instinct of delicacy prevented me, and I left it there, curious to know if my wife would speak to me of having received it, or if my jealous behaviour had driven her to diplomatic secrecy.

Stainless as I knew her to be of aught savouring of intrigue, I was relieved when she spoke to me concerning this letter. It was not till after our mid-day meal, and I had spent the forenoon in idleness, incapable of concentrating my attention on my work. I could hardly bear to sit opposite her at table, listening to her light talk, knowing what lay in her pocket. Cecily was away from home, spending a few weeks with Reuben's mother, and Nan and I were alone, so I could not take refuge in silence, but was forced to play an indifferent part, utilising such histrionic ability as I possessed.

"From your friend Granby," she broke out suddenly, pulling forth the packet and looking at me with a face filled with complex emotions, amusement not hindermost amongst them. "He writes most concernedly of your health," she went on, "and also of a scandal that is wagging tongues in Town, from whence he has lately returned. The letter is not franked, as you may see," she babbled on, holding it up. "His servant brought it." She made a fine feint of great ease, but I could see that she was troubled.

"I hate him!" I burst out suddenly, knowing it vain to dissemble. She looked at me reproachfully and shook her pretty head.

"Oh, Tony! he saved——" she began (I knew she would), but got no further, for I leapt to my feet in a very fury, and in my hurry dragged the cloth, and a dish fell crashing on the floor. I did not heed it, and would have left the room had not Nan seized my arm and forced me to a chair, screaming with laughter the while. Her merriment rang so heart-whole that I could not choose but join.

Lately our days had been but grey, haunted with a lost presence, and this flash of jocundity was welcome, as breaking the thraldom of our

sorrow and subtly tuning life to a normal key. But loth though I was to mar the hour, I desired to bring home to her the necessity for caution with one of Granby's creed regarding women. But she—she would not heed, nor even affect to listen, stopping my mouth with kisses when I spoke of him, or else assuming a vexation that bid fair to tremble into anger.

"I will forbid him the house," I fumed.

"No—no," she said, and for a moment I could have sworn that a monstrous terror shone in her eyes; "do not anger him."

"Any one would think you feared him," I said, the memory of that evanescent flash green in my memory. "I hate him, too," she whispered, as if fearful that walls had ears. "For why? He sows dissension between us two." She would have kissed me again, but I knew that she lied, and rejected the proffered caress. Her face shadowed, as will that of a child when repulsed, but she dared my glance! "Honest! I hate—hate—*hate* him!" she repeated, putting out a hand in earnest of good faith.

"Honesty is said to be the best policy," I returned, striving to speak lightly.

"An apothegm that no doubt emanated from the dock," she flipped at me,

"Turning cynic?" I said, and laughed, in spite of my irritation, at her ready tongue.

"What is a cynic?" she said, with feminine astuteness, striving to coax me from the stormy subject of our converse.

"A cynic is a believer in human nature," I sneered. "He holds that it will triumph over love, truth, faith, and honour; and, by my soul, I hold him right," I added with returning temper.

"Swear not at all," she reproved gravely; "not even by a negligeable quantity."

"Granby——" I began.

"Oh, Granby me no Granbys!" she said, with an imperious stamp of foot; "one man at a time is enough for any woman."

"I am not jealous," I said, clutching at my dignity with both hands; "but—but——" and I stuck unhappily, shamed by the gay interrogation in her eyes, and for the time my fears were lulled.

I do not know whether Granby had read what was passing in my mind at our last meeting, when my mother's death had saved me from an inexcusable passion, but when he rode over some days later to visit us, his manner had lost the arrogance that had formerly charac-

terized it, and was, indeed, conciliatory. He stayed but a few minutes, for Nan, to my great thankfulness, did not appear, and I made no effort to detain him. He had but lately arrived from Town, he told me, and was living at his own house some ten miles from us. He made a few remarks regarding the dulness of the country, congratulated me on my recovered health; and then came an awkward silence, which I did not break, and he rose. As he was leaving he bade me give his respects to my wife, and express his regret that the continued lowness of spirits from which she suffered made it impossible for her to receive visitors (an excuse, it appeared, that the maid had pleaded when he called at our house a few days previously, and which he obviously thought had emanated from me). I knew nothing of the matter, and would have said a civil word, when his manner suddenly changed, and he broke into a low, mocking laugh.

"She is not over-strong," I began, and waited puzzled.

"Be careful of her, Punchinello," he said; "accidents happen." And before I could respond his horse was away, and only the clatter of the hoofs sounded up the avenue.

I spoke of his visit to Nan, but she said no word but "I hate him," while her face grew white to the very mouth.

"Is there aught between you?" I said in fury, noting her eyes of fear.

"Nothing—nothing! Please God, I shall never see his face again!" was all she cried, and then flung her arms round my neck, saying she loved me the better for my silly jealousy, and gibing at Granby; but I could not forget her frightened eyes, and, despite myself, a suspicion stole into my mind that she was fooling me.

One spring evening a week later an incident occurred which, trivial in itself, was sufficient to fan my suspicion to a quicker flame. I had not seen my wife since the early afternoon, when she had spoken of walking to see a sick child in the hamlet that lay a mile's distance from our doors. I had begun to feel uneasy, for the greyness was fast growing opaque, and I could not bear the thought of her wandering lonely through the lanes, when she suddenly appeared, all panting with running and her face marked with traces of late agitation.

When I asked what ailed her, she turned on

me furiously, saying I made her life a hell with baseless suspicion—I, who had had no thought of aught but that some accident had happened to her. But her words set the latent jealousy in my mind working, and no doubt my expression testified to the error of judgment she had committed, for she would have reclaimed her speech and made all smooth with pretty words; but it was too late, and though I strove to answer her easily I could not help my voice, that rang curiously even in my own ears.

A few days later I walked alone, striving to allay my mind's uneasiness by such rapid exercise as I could compass. Being feeble, I seldom went great distances, but on this particular day it seemed as if my body were informed with a feverish restlessness that I could not control, though my limbs ached from weariness. I walked on and on, resolving every moment to turn, yet forced further by a mysterious force that rendered me incapable of volition. I had long left the high road, and was skirting a wood preparatory to again striking out across country, when my eyes were caught by the flutter of a woman's gown between the trees. It was a black gown, and the sombre folds struck a dismal note in the gay green of the

newly-leaved trees. She was speaking to some one half concealed by a trunk, and was seemingly entreating this hidden personage—at least, so I gathered from her clasped hands. There was something strangely familiar about her back. I held my breath in pain as I advanced, fearing I knew not what, and not allowing my real fear even to myself. Suddenly the girl—for she was no more—turned her head, and the thought that I had denied crystallized and flashed clearly, no longer to be cheated. I recognised my wife and Granby. They could not see me as I crept towards them, but I could see that Nan's face was drenched with tears, and scraps of their talk floated towards me on the breeze.

I crouched towards them; my senses seemed to have all converged into that of hearing, which was intensified to a point that touched anguish. "Cosmo—Cosmo!" I heard her say, and then the wind wantoned in the canopy of leaves over my head, and I heard but a confused murmur when she spoke. I could just see him, as he stood with the confident, conquering smile on his face that I had so hated when a child.

"You fear him mightily"—the breeze was

stayed for the moment, and his voice travelled clearly to me. "Is it a savage Lilliputian?" I knew he spoke of me, and how my ears were strained to hear her answer! But the accursed flutter began again in the dancing leaves, and worse—a great bar of golden light cleft the interlaced boughs and glittered on the silver buttons on my coat, so I was forced to crouch lower; but although I could not hear her speak, their actions were clear enough. I saw him step forward and take her in his arms, and press his mouth to hers, which she suffered all unresisting. "I must go," she said; "it grows late. Give——" I could have sworn for fury at the breeze. What was it she craved? His love and kisses, no doubt. Again his arms wound round her, and she lay unresisting in them while he covered her face with kisses. I could not hear their farewells, but suddenly she broke from him and went running, swift as a lapwing, towards home, while Cosmo turned and went in the opposite direction.

It seemed to me that, although she suffered his caresses without resistance, there was no happiness in the meeting; for at the corner of the path, as she turned, I saw that she was still crying, and, if I know aught of the language

of gesticulation, her outstretched hands spoke clearly of some unfulfilled desire. He, too, looked back, and shook his head and laughed, as one who kindly denies a child an unreasonable request, and I wondered for a moment, striving to unravel the mystery. But I could not think consecutively. My jealous fury metamorphosed me for the time into a wild beast. I fell on the ground and tore the earth with my hands, while my brain worked blindly in endeavour to compass a meet revenge.

Out of the whirling tangle of my mind a plan slowly evolved itself, and showed me that I could at least defeat his designs. If not mine, at least not his. Death, the merciless knife that cuts knots that mock man's ingenuity; by death might she be saved. One or the other must go. I prayed not my Nan. If I bided my hour, some chance might deliver him into my hand, and then she might spend her span of years on earth, for aught I cared, unharmed. I had no desire to send her after him into eternity—as soon should she breathe the same air here below. Even knowing the monstrous wickedness she did, my heart cried out for her, as memories of her sweet presence flooded my mind, and my love, that I

had thought lay dead, leapt up victorious, vanquishing my anger at her unfaithfulness; and I, who but a moment past had cursed her, now sought excuse for her wantonness, and found it in mine own infirmity and the temptings of the devil by whose wiles she had fallen.

What was I to hope to keep a woman's love—I, Punchinello? I laughed through my tears, and the mad ring of gaiety in my ears checked my merriment. If I would do my work, it behoved me to keep sane and sober, and, by a mighty effort, I beat back the maniacal laughter on my lips.

Surely, surely—and I moved cautiously making no alarm, was cunning and patient—my desire would be given me, and I should see Cosmo lying stark and still, with all the comeliness gone from his face for ever. The glory of the brief spring afternoon died to wan twilight, and a chill fog crept up from the far sea and lay over the land, lending fantastic shapes to commonest objects and drenching the grass heavily. The sinking sun hung a gigantic ruddy ball low in the west, a ray struck the pale mist, lacing it with scarlet, till it looked streaked with blood. But I did not move; careless of time, and loth to break the

returning coherence of my thoughts. The reason of the curious pleadings of her attitude that I had noted, and could not fathom, chimed in my ears—a peal rung gaily by Satan—"She prays him take her from you." He is cautious and bids her wait, saying, "Not yet; not yet." She prays him, but he will not; he is adamant to her tears and last appeals. "Not yet!"—I smiled to myself as I thought how far better he had done to have made speedy with his prize. The coolness of head, on which he so relied, had for once lost him the game. I had but to exercise self-mastery, and the victory was mine. I forced myself to keep still and quiet, balancing my chances one against the other, while the shadows deepened and the sky began to hang out its lights.

They say in their ignorance now that I am mad. Ah, fools! I was mad then, as I sat in that wood planning a murder, lingering on my revenge lovingly, lest I mar it by haste. Mad—that I did not harbour, for the flash of a second, the thought of my wife's innocence. Mad—that when in the mist-wreaths I seemed to see her face, innocent as I had known it, with only the shadow of a great terror on it, I mocked and jeered, pointing scoffing fingers at it. Once I

shrieked the foulest name with which a woman can be smirched, and an echo leapt in answer.

Then I laughed and cried all in a breath, for it seemed as if the wide world had caught wind of her shame and was proclaiming the news. Side by side with this fancy I embraced the knowledge that I held the power to save her. If he should escape me—then she should lie safe in the warm earth's breast, and her name be kept pure at any cost. It has been said by poets and women that hearts break. I do not know whether the brain burns the brighter for this sacrifice, but when at length I rose and began to make my way homeward, it seemed to me that my mental powers were marvellously intensified, and that all my emotions lay dead for ever. I felt myself braced by an iron self-control. I could have watched Cosmo philandering with Nan and made no sign. What did it matter now my path lay clear before me? I buoyed myself with the knowledge of my new strength—and then, all in a moment, the sharp contrast between my present misery and the fair happiness that I had thought my future life would hold broke my resolution, and I fell to crying bitter tears and calling, "Nan!—Nan!" like any weak fool.

I would not wait on this hour though it holds place in my life, but as I write I know again the aching desolation, the awful loneliness. Tricked and fooled, first by one and then another; scorned by God and man alike; I cursed the God that had so mocked me and the folly that had rendered it so easy. I, Punchinello, wedded to one of the fairest maids in England. How well she had matched Cosmo, had they mated! but I, poor dwarf, stunted semblance of a man, stood between—I, Punchinello, so aptly named in the long ago.

XV

WHEN I reached home that night, my wife overwhelmed me with caresses and attentions, commenting the while on my worn-out appearance. She chatted incessantly, questioning me as to where I had spent the afternoon, and without waiting for an answer telling of how she had wandered far afield, careless of the lapse of time.

I watched her, as she ministered to me, with eyes that saw her with a clearer vision. Never had she seemed so winsome to me as she appeared that night, and never had she appeared gayer. I had no difficulty in following her mood, giving her jest for jest, and capping her nonsense easily enough—while, even as the light words flowed, my brain worked steadily at compassing her lover's destruction, with sufficient craftiness to ensure success.

Once my attention flagged a little as my thoughts drifted to ways and means, and she checked her strain of gay speech, feigning a

pouting displeasure: "What are you thinking of, Tony? You afford me scant attention."

I remember that, drawn by the fascination that tempts moths to flutter round danger, I could not forbear alluding in cypher—so to speak—to the knowledge I had attained in the last four-and-twenty hours. I said no word that could have afforded a clue to the keenest wits, but I played a little with my sorrow, mocking myself as men will, feeling if they do not laugh they must go mad.

"Scant attention?" I caught the words sweet with her breath. "It is ill," I said, "to study a woman over-carefully—one finds flaws in the most exquisite creation. For myself, I look neither forwards nor backwards, but enjoy," and I slipped my arm uxoriously round her waist, and smiled at her with a simulated pride of possession, watching her carefully the while for some symptom of betrayal.

I remember this time down to its smallest detail, for in it, by what I regarded as vaguely exculpatory words, intended to allay the smart of a wounded conscience, my Nan finally damned herself in my eyes.

"Look forwards? look back?" She repeated my words after me much as I had

repeated her own. "Must a woman be flawless to be loved?" she asked; and I knew whither her mind tended, and chuckled with my breath. I had not thought to hear her condemnation from her own mouth.

"It is wiser," I repeated, "when close inspection is fatal, not to court disillusion. See here" —I took a book from the shelf and would have read her an allegory which I have always loved —"this is how the wise behave." But she interrupted me, snatched the book from my hands and laughed long and loud.

"*I* will read it, Tony—you omit too generously when scanning printed matter, and it is a great matter to know how to preserve an illusion. Shall I read it?" she said, looking up into my face from the low chair on which she sat. "I will do it justice in my most mellifluous accents."

For a moment, as she stood before me, her perfect face not a foot from mine, the fragrance of her breath in my nostrils, the curve of her bosom swelling beneath her close bodice, I feared that the devils I held in leash would prove the stronger. As I looked at her they rose clamouring, and my fingers itched to press the life from out her fair body. But

as I stared at her the fit passed, and I saw the terror in her face.

"What is it?" she said brokenly. "Do not look at me like that!"

Her voice calmed me, and I answered her lightly, pushing the book towards her.

"Read—read!" I said, and kissed her on the mouth, where so lately Cosmo's caresses had lain.

She took the book and commenced the tale, and slowly, as she read, the fever in my brain subsided, and my blood ceased to run in such mad tumult through my veins. I will write the tale she read. Every line is informed with her voice. As I gaze on the dull printed lines, I hear the clear notes and see her again with bent head reading bravely to the end, breaking off now and again to scoff. Whatever her faults, she was of a rare courage. Hush! she is reading now; the quick, light tone of her voice is sounding in my ears; I hear her clearly.

The Scarlet Lily.

In her garden there were half-blown buds flushing rosily through their green sheaths, and half-open lily cups shyly hiding their golden hearts.

On the trees the young leaves quivered a pale green, or lay curled in soft knots upon the boughs, slowly breaking into life. There were tiny shoots just showing above the rich brown earth, and here and there the beds were broken up by masses of purple and gold, where pansies glinted in the sunlight.

She walked unheeding among the beds, and stopped before a large scarlet bud that shot up from among the dark green leaves which veiled its perfection.

"My choice!" she whispered; "my heart's desire!"

She pressed her lips to the flower, and under her warm breath the petals of the bud quivered and wavered a shade apart, showing in some degree the nascent beauty within.

She breathed away a grain of dust that had fallen on the glossy calyx, and broke apart an overhanging branch, so that nothing could come between her flower and the sunshine.

And day by day, as she tended it, the plant grew in strength and beauty, flooding the garden in its overpowering fragrance. The butterflies floated round it in gaily-painted hordes, paying it court as it stood swaying in the breeze, like a queen acknowledging homage.

Round it the maiden cleared away the grasses that threatened to choke up the ground, in order that the roots should spread out freely, and watched it hourly, with the tender loving eyes of a mother for her firstborn.

Through the long nights she lay on the ground beside it, lest it open in the darkness and she lose the flowering of her desire, watching and waiting until she grew pale and wan with deferred hope.

Round her, sun-kissed and wind-caressed, the other flowers flourished in a great luxuriance, but they were forgotten—in her passion she never noted or cared.

Above her head there swung a quivering canopy of green, through which the sky showed like patches of blue mosaic among the tracery of leaf and branch, but she never looked higher than the height of the scarlet lily.

One night, worn out with long watching, she slept, and when she awoke the bud had opened; and she cried out aloud with great joy, and knelt before it in worship, half-blind with its dazzling beauty, and drunk with her great gladness.

But even as she knelt, from out the heart of the flower crawled a worm—another—and

yet another; and she saw that her pride, her desire, was decayed and corrupt within—a foul thing from which she shrank and shuddered.

And as she lay on the ground, crying with great sobs, a white rose—a poor, pale bud—bent its head down to her face and whispered, "Take comfort; it is so poor a thing for which to grieve—so fair without, so foul within. Love me!" But the girl pushed it impatiently away, and cried again, refusing to be comforted.

And then she saw that from where she had flung herself in her passionate recoil, and lay looking through her blinding tears, the decay was no longer visible, and the flower flamed scarlet and perfect in the golden flooding sunlight, as fair as the lily of her dreams.

Now the tears dried on her face, as its beauty struck her afresh with a great thrill; she felt the old love return, and was comforted, and lay keeping guard over it in the distance, never venturing too near.

But in a few days she could discern its growing decay from even that point; but this time she had learnt wisdom, and instead of lamenting, moved hurriedly a few steps further away, and fell again to its adoration.

And as the days passed, she moved further

and further away, until the flower was only a red patch in the grey distance; but she looked at it with loving eyes, casting away all thought of its honour, and seeing only the beauty.

The roses raised their pink faces to her, and touched the air with their fragrant whispering: "Hearken to us, whose beauty is not only seeming"; but she turned away.

The proud, pure lilies bowed their stately heads as she passed, turning the silken sheen of their snowy petals towards her; but she would none of them, and gazed always, with tired, shining eyes, at the flower she loved so well.

Time passed on, and she grew old and grey, but still she gazed at the same spot, although the lily had long since fallen, and lay on the ground in festering corruption.

But the woman looked always towards the place where it had waved triumphant in the light and air; and as time passed, she forgot the things she had seen, and how, day by day, she had shrunk back for fear of what she might behold; and again she saw the tall crimson bud in its glowing beauty, and her heart throbbed as she yearned afresh for the hour of its unfolding.

"That woman was a fool," said my wife, with a touch of bitterness. "If one has been tricked, it is well to cast away the worthless rag. The heroine is aptly feminine. It takes a woman to go on loving when she understands. No man condones," and she looked at me with a challenge in her face. "This sickly fable illustrates the attitude of women from all time. No man forgives," she went on, and her voice broke suddenly, while I stared at her, wondering what her next words would hold. But in a flash her mood changed.

"The maid was passing foolish—the tale was passing long. I would rather waste my breath on this," and she took up a book of verses that lay at my side. "Hearken, Tony,—by such symptoms shall a man recognise the tender passion. It seems a prodigious waste of emotion. Didst ever 'thy soul in numbers move,' Tony? Nay—more like in chromatics! Now listen!

"Once did my thoughts both ebb and flow,
As passion did them move;
Once did I hope—straight fear again—
And then I was in love.

Once did I, waking, spend the night,
And tell how many minutes move.

Once did I, wishing, waste the day—
  And then I was in love.

Once, by my carving true-love's knot,
  The weeping tones did prove
That wounds and tears were both our lot—
  And then I was in love.

Once did I breathe another's breath,
  And in my mistress move;
Once was I not mine own at all—
  And then I was in love.

Once I wore bracelets made of hair,
  And collars did approve;
Once wore my clothes made out of wax—
  And then I was in love.

Once did I sonnet to my saint,
  My soul in numbers move;
Once did I tell a thousand lies—
  And then I was in love.

Once in my ear did dangling hang
  A little turtle-dove;
Once, in a word, I was a fool—
  And then I was in love."

She finished with a trill of merriment, and would have kissed me; but my self-control was strained to its uttermost limit, and I could only push her from me in dumb passion.

She feigned to notice nothing, only saying petulantly: "Methinks you are turning sage—

at least you are no longer a fool by reason of being in love," and, pleading something of fatigue, left me. Her eyes were misty, for all her gay smile. Ah, God! the lash of memory! She would have kissed me, and I would not!

XVI

FOR another week or so life flowed on evenly, Granby's name never passing between us by a tacit agreement that needed no putting into words. I was waiting, and she?—God knows what lay beneath the froth of her gaiety and her never-failing mirth. Sometimes I read a shadow in her eyes and surmised that she was impatient of the deferred hour that should bring her lover; her speech was informed with a touch of bitterness foreign to it, which lent keener edge to her sayings, and in some indefinable way I felt that for all her jocundity she had parted with her youth, and looked on life with sadder eyes.

"We see little of Granby," I said carelessly one day. I spoke tentatively, vaguely conscious that my murderous intent were easier were he unsuspicious, also hounded on by a sick desire to see them together and watch them at my ease, yet fearful of awakening mistrust by too sudden a change of front. Nan regarded me curiously and turned away with a laugh on her mouth. I

could see that she was acting, for her eyes had a curious watchful stillness in them and her lips smiled as if twitched to merriment by force.

"For my part I care not whether he comes or goes," she answered lightly enough, though her voice had a strained note in it.

"No?" I said, my gaze rivetted on her face to note if she blanched or flushed.

Her eyes lifted and met mine, and for one moment my vile thoughts fled as the darkness before the spreading whiteness of dawn, and I knew her innocent. But even as I looked she spoke, and my suspicions returned strengthened a thousand-fold.

"Do not anger him," she said. The water brimmed in her eyes. "O God! O God!" she cried and fell to weeping tempestuously. For all the black fury in my heart I could not bear her crying; I tried to comfort her, and then she flung herself before me, and it seemed as though she trembled on the verge of a confession. Yet I had accused her in no way.

Looking back, it seems to me incomprehensible that I should not have guessed that she was oppressed with a great sorrow; but I was full of my own explanation of her griefs and tempers, and never dreamed of another key to the

mystery. I noticed that she began to grow white and wan. Often in her sleep she would speak Granby's name and fall to sobbing in her dreams, while I lay beside her alert to hear, and smiling in the darkness as she called on her lover.

My one idea possessed me to the exclusion of all others—to kill Granby, and if possible in such manner as to make the manner of his death seem accidental, thereby avoiding an inquiry that might result in the blackening of my wife's name.

His visits had re-commenced. He was for ever in our house making open love to my wife, while she would sit smiling on him, yet with terror in her eyes—and I waited.

I waited and waited till the summer flushed the land and the spring lay far behind us, and still I waited patiently. I pressed his hand in greeting, and never showed by deed or word that his presence was unwelcome or that I knew of his clandestine meetings with my wife. I was ever the genial host, pressing him to join us, throwing him with Nan, and always I waited for my chance.

But it never came for all my waiting; or perhaps more truly I lacked the tenacity of

purpose necessary for such work as I contemplated.

It grew hourly more difficult to play my part, and to preserve the appearance of ignorant placidity that was so essential—the facile smile, the ready words. In place of these it seemed to me sometimes that the beast in me must win and I spring suddenly at Cosmo's throat while he bent towards my wife, speaking to her in that semi-whisper he affected, and which eternally suggested confidential words. Still I might have kept up the play a little longer had it not been for news that my wife brought me one morning. She came to me looking with great frightened eyes out of her white face that had grown to look so small and drawn in these last few months, and I was arrested by a curious change in her expression. Lately she had been alternating between the gayest and saddest moods, each of which left an evanescent mark on her face, but now she looked somewhat awe-struck and glad with a solemn joy.

"Anthony!" she said, and the warm pink ran racing to her cheeks. "Anthony!"

I stared at her impatiently, for lately I had grown to hate her presence, and never more than

when she simulated love for me. "Anthony!" she said again with despair in her voice, as I glared at her with hard, incurious eyes,—"Anthony, we shall soon be three."

And then—God forgive me!—I fell to laughing, for I harboured no doubt as to the begetter of her child, and it seemed to me the supremest irony that she should come to me with her flushings and paleings, whispering of the coming third. And she fell back a pace with a look in her eyes of one wounded to death. "Anthony," she said again, and put out her hand and touched me timidly on the sleeve, and I shook her off in a sudden access of passion.

"Have you no shame?" I flung at her.

She fell at my feet in a swoon. I could not trust myself, and calling the maids to attend her I left the house and sought peace in solitude, striving to regain my lapsed self-control. My reason rocked as I realized my full impotence. Though I forbid him the house, I knew he would meet her elsewhere. If I took her away, he would follow. Money was nothing to him. The gratification of his desire was the end and aim of his life. His life! his life! I had gladly followed him into the future would it have aided me to terminate his existence. But at

least he should not have Nan. Lost to me—she should be lost to him. He was impregnable, secure from my assaults. The last few weeks it seemed as if he had read what was passing in my mind, for I had caught his eyes fixed on me uneasily once or twice, and he came less often to our house, but I knew that she often met him. I used to follow them and sit and watch them in the grey gloaming, and count his kisses and her tears. Why did she weep? I often wondered. A handsome lover abroad and an easy dupe—as she thought—at home.

Can any woman want more? I was indeed ungainly, but my name served her as protection, my house as home, so even I served a purpose and was, with the exception of rare outbursts, sufficiently ductile.

So in my thoughts I would mock myself and her, but most the vanity that had brought me to this pass, and led me to reckon that I could win and hold, like happier men. She had loathed me somewhat less than the aged rip to whom her aunt would have given her; perhaps, to be fair, she had felt something of kindliness towards me—the pity that is akin to love—and I in my madness had snatched at it, half afraid of the magnitude of the gift vouchsafed me. I

blamed her not. What was I to hold a woman's love? Like to like—they matched each other well; but he should never take her from me—never—never.

XVII

I STRIVE to write coherently, but my pulses race when I linger on this time; and for all my endeavour to sort a right incident and emotion I stand confused before the tide of mixed remembrance, glad and sad, that sweeps everything before it. Yet I would write with stable hand, and fling my life on the page precisely as it passed.

Now I tell what cannot be explained by strict laws of logic, viz.: that inasmuch as I suspected in darker moments the paternity of the embryo life that Nan carried, my heart went out to her in her difficult hour as it had never done in her happiest days. I had loved her gay and flippant, with her unerring shaft of speech, her fresh beauty, her light laughter, but I loved her better now with her tired eyes and dragging gait. In my heart there came a desire to believe in her again. I do not know what had checked me from voicing my suspicions to her, but it was hardly fear. Now that time has rendered lumin-

ous the days of my sorrow, I fancy I dreaded hearing her confess her sin ; and clung to some shadowy hope, the existence of which I barely recognised. But one night when we sat in the gloaming without, talking, as had come to be our habit, with an assumption of ease that deceived neither of us, she made some careless jest, and I heard the rain of falling tears through her laughter, and knew that silence was no longer possible. There came a hush in our speech, and we looked into each other's eyes, and I knew her innocent.

"What has come between us, Tony?" she said, and with the old familiar gesture her face nestled on my shoulder. "I am miserable, Anthony," and her cry—Christ forgive me—was as the sobbing of a strayed child.

For the moment the devil in my heart rested, and I knew that she was pure for all the black evidence against her. She was young and careless, irresponsible, irreflective, but white as the angels. I knew it for the moment, and took her in my arms, comforting her, and praying her tell me her trouble; and before I knew it Granby's name was out of my mouth, and she was shuddering and trembling so that she could barely speak.

"Anthony, Anthony!" I hear her now, and the breath of lips long dead is warm on my face. "Do not ask me," she cried: "I am ashamed, ashamed."

"Of what?" Still I held her in my arms, loth to let her go, believing in her, though my heart grew heavy at her words. "Of what?" I said impatiently, for as every minute flitted it grew more difficult to combat my growing terror. "Of what?" I repeated harshly, and shook her not too gently by the arm. "Tell me, or shall I ask Granby?"

She made no answer to my foul insinuation, but twisted herself free of my embrace, and would have gone swiftly into the house, leaving me to my bitter thoughts, had I not stayed her; and in a great flood there leapt out the tale of what I had witnessed, while she stared at me, aghast at my knowledge.

"You think——" she began, and could not finish for very shame, while I vainly awaited the words that should explain the mystery.

"What had your father said?" I asked, filled with scorn for the name by which I sought to conjure her, yet grasping at any means to make her speak. But she, with sobbing breath, bade me never speak of him again, and broke away.

I let her go, perceiving, finally, the futility of endeavouring to coerce her; but as she went the tiny flame of my hope was extinguished, and I knew her for what she was.

* * * * *

A few days passed, in which, to the best of my belief, she had not met him. I watched her with unnecessary vigilance, for I knew that shortly he would bid her seek him at his house, and that she would go; but it seemed as if we all waited in the hush of a coming storm.

Then one night, goaded by a passion that turned my brain to madness, and in which all prudential considerations were lost, I went and waited for him at his gates, meaning to shoot him as a dog; but though I waited long, until the darkness lay like a heavy pall on the earth, he did not come, and I went home baffled, praying patience.

Nan met me on my return, and in her I noted a subtle change. She seemed the Nan I had known in the past, with the shadow lifted from her eyes, and some of the old joyous timbre in her voice.

"Ooterwint is here!" her voice came gaily to me. "Where have you been, Anthony—lost

afield?" And I wondered at her, learned though I was in her sudden changes of mood.

I brushed past her, fearing her eyes, and greeted Ooterwint, who stood behind her with his wig pushed awry, and his face eloquent of great tidings.

"Pack in haste, Master Anthony," he said to me hurriedly, not heeding my greeting. "You must be in Town before the week is passed," and then burst into jubilant predictions, jumbling possibilities and probabilities, talk of honours and the necessity of speedy travelling, in heterogeneous speech. At length from very lack of breath he was forced to pause, and I turned to Nan, seeking an explanation.

"He says that you have a fair chance of being elected organist at the Abbey." Her eyes met mine, glad with congratulation, yet with something of withholding in their gaze, as if she feared me, and watched warily lest she offend.

"You must be in Town as soon as possible." Old Ooterwint was himself again, and his words flowed fluently. "Why not you as well as another? But you must catch the hour and get the ear of His Majesty. The affair will be settled in two months at farthest. Ah! poor

Hermann!" he flung in tribute to the dead, "to think that he should be no more;" and here he fetched a portentous sigh in a regret that for all its voluminous expression sounded fictitious. "And madam here,"—he made my wife a handsome bow, and smiled brightly, but I noted that his jocundity was somewhat forced, and I puzzled what he knew or guessed,—"And madam," he repeated, "does she go to see the fashions? You will accompany him?" he asked. His gaze swept over her, and it seemed to me his eyes grew strangely pitiful. And yet at that moment she seemed no mark for compassion. Her cheeks were pink—painted with excitement—her eyes bright, her pretty face all aglow.

"Of course I go," she answered him, and would have laid her hand on mine, but I shrank back involuntarily, and her hand fell by her side. Oh! Nan—Nan! Then she winced, as if stung, but recovered herself gallantly, and turned again to Ooterwint, and talked and laughed as if she were ignorant of all care; but I had seen her lips blanch, and knew that she understood.

XVIII

HAD it not been for Ooterwint's unflagging entreaties and commands, I doubt if I had gone to London at this time, for all the golden opportunity I should be missing.

The bent of my life was changed, and my ambitions were sapped and dead. I had no place for any emotion but the jealousy that devoured me and the hunger of revenge. Time had been when I had spent many days and nights, my brain fruitlessly planning and calculating how to strike at Granby without slurring my wife's name. Now I would have shot him in full glare of noon, and laughed to hear them talk.

But it seemed as though he had divined my thoughts, and evaded me. I watched my wife as a cat does a mouse, but they apparently appreciated their danger, and either endured a temporary severance, or had discovered a way of meeting unknown to me. Myself I believe that he was content for the nonce to let her be,

knowing that he had but to lift his hand, and she would come to him. He was by nature cool and wary, and of a never-failing patience where his ends were concerned. I imagined him smiling quietly to himself at his facile success; he was no hot-headed fool to risk his life or impede his wishes by a too hasty clearance of impediment, else long ago he had brushed me from his path, I knew. I was mad—mad as any poor soul in Bedlam, tortured beyond endurance, and the keenest pang of my anguish was the great love I bore her, that seemed to grow and strengthen in proportion as she became lost to me. I had indeed my hours when I hated her, when I flung bitter taunts and foul accusations, not choosing my words over-carefully; but surely her sobbing would close my lips, and always in my extremest bitterness there lurked the cruel knowledge that I had done her an irrevocable wrong when I took her to wife. Yet before God I had dreamed that she loved me.

When at last Ooterwint prevailed, and I consented to go to Town, her delight knew no bounds. In my blindness I believed that it was due to the increased opportunities it would afford her of meeting Granby, who would

assuredly follow her. I was mad, mad—and now it is too late.

* * * * *

We had been in Town the best part of a week, and the ultimatum regarding the rival merits of the candidates were still in abeyance. It was a coveted post, and there was much talk of favouritism and influence, of angry jealousies, and so forth—at least, so I read in that exquisite biography. Myself I remember only Nan. Vaguely, indeed, lies in my mind the remembrance of interviews and writings, of hearing eager talk, but it is all more or less misty. But clear as yesterday, indeed more sharply, I mind each word and laugh of my wife's, her quick interest, her gay delight. I mind how I winced under curious eyes when we walked abroad; she so fair and gracious, I——!

She seemed to have flung the untoward past behind her for the hour, and seized with avidity such chance of gaiety as her health permitted. And I noted that wherever she went men's eyes lingered on her, telling the same tale that was written in Cosmo's gaze that winter afternoon. "*For jealousy is cruel as the grave.*" The sombre line haunted me, eternally whispering in the stir and sunshine of the streets, speaking to

me in the silent night as I lay beside her; she, tossing restlessly and babbling of Cosmo, her vigilance of the day availing her nothing.

* * * * *

Sometimes, when tortured beyond endurance, I strive to wring comfort from the thought that it was she who planned that pleasure-trip on the river. At first I would not consent to take her. Why, I cannot say, for I always humoured her every whim; and when she pressed me for the why and wherefore of my refusal, I could not ascribe it to any valid reason. An invincible repugnance bade me negative her prayers, and please God, had I only been firm to the end . . . but finally I succumbed to her entreaties.

It was a gay day, trenching on the final lease of summer, when we drifted down the sleepy river, my sculls dropping slowly on the leaden water. Some two years past, much in this environment, I had been duped by Mistress Marjory. As the remembrance crossed my mind I fell to laughing loudly, thinking that this time I was not so easily fooled, and Nancy turned and looked at me curiously with frightened eyes.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said, and laughed again, while she turned away with the old wan look of trouble on her face; but it was gone in a moment, and she was teasing me to near the bank to enable her to tear away a bunch of guelder-rose. My mental picture gallery is set with memories of that day. I see her dragging the bough ruthlessly back, standing in a white shower of scattered bloom, with face dimpling with smiles at my remonstrances. I see her stacking her hands with forget-me-nots, pushing a posy into my coat, jesting all the while, forestalling the terror to come, in gay teasing speech. "How long would I live in your thoughts, T[illegible];—an the river took me, as was the sad fate of the maid in the legend, and I flung you a remembrance?—your Nan of the past would be lost in the oratorio of the future." And I, striving to meet her mood, denied it not, but made merry with her, while mocking Death stood by waiting.

She was not feigning—I know it. I cannot, I will not doubt it. She had a happy hour before the end. Oh, my beloved, to feel that you did not go, glad to leave me, broken by a burden too heavy for your bearing; to know that there were no false notes in your

laughter, no undercurrent of meaning in your careless words. "How long shall I live in your thoughts, an the river take me?" How long? Eternity shall reply. Are you answered now, my sweetheart? Your remembrance is naught but a tiny shred of withered weed, a skeleton thing half gone to dust, but to me it is blue with flowers and dripping damply when I stare at it. I feel an impatient hand thrusting itself against me, and hear a petulant voice in clamorous insistence. Your touch was very sure, my Nan; did you know it was a parting gift, that you fixed it so firmly and would not be gainsaid?

We had brought our meal with us, having thought not to touch land until the day was spent, and we ate and drank together, making merry as two lovers, and never a shadow of what had marred our life for so many weeks darkened that day. Later it seemed to me as if some premonition of what the future held must have unconsciously influenced us to greedy ravishment of the flying hours, bidding us crush out their utmost sweetness. But they sped swiftly on, the glory of the day began to fade, and the west grew vivid-hued, and at last, warned by the growing twilight, I turned and

began to scull homewards. The gloaming darkened rapidly, touching the river to mysterious loveliness of fading light and quickening shade; the lap-lap of the water made music against the sides of the boat, mixing with the plaintive sighing of the osiers on the banks, and Nan's talk began to come less trippingly, and she shivered a little, as if chilled by the ghostly beauty round her, staring silently at the flowing water starred with white lily-cups, stretching out an idle hand from time to time to snatch at a floating bud. I tried to revert to the old pleasantries, but the jests sounded stale, and for all my trying the words stuck in my throat, and my laughter rang discordant. At last, with a tired sigh, Nan broke the long silence, during which she had stared down at the river as though she would pierce its depths. "I am weary," she said, her head bent down, "so weary." Her voice was full of tears. "The river sings a lullaby. I could sleep to its croon for ever, and never know another fret." She leaned over, and her tears splashed on the water, while I cried out to her impatiently that she be careful—fearful of her change of mood, and anxious to stop her words, believing in my madness that I was already familiar with her coming

talk. She settled herself in the stern and looked at me with brilliant eyes, burning with a flame that dried her tears, and her mouth narrowed into a hard line. It was another Nan confronting me to any I had ever known—a desperate, driven woman with trapped, miserable eyes that steadfastly sought my gaze.

"Anthony," she began, and her voice died. "Anthony, for weeks past I have been trying to tell you——"

"Do not," I prayed her sharply; "we have been so happy. To-morrow——"

"If not to-day," she broke out passionately, "it will be never—never—never," and the waters caught the echo of her prophecy and sang it in their splash; it rustled in the rushes, the wind caught it and sent it flying over the far stretch of fast-glooming upland, "never—never." She bent forwards and wrung her hands. "Help me, Tony," she cried, "question me—by love of the old days, help me to set my life aright again."

I stared at her, powerless to check her tale. "I know—I know," I flung out.

"You do *not*," she said fiercely; "you are mad with your jealousy, Tony. Granby——"

His name stung me to madness, and I stopped

her again most brutally. We drifted down the waters in silence for a time, and when she next spoke it was of some indifferent matter, and for a space we talked of trifles. But always it seemed to me as if she lingered on the brink of a confession, and always I repulsed her, affecting not to understand. I could not bear to hear it from her own mouth.

Whether she would have told me the entire truth, thereby changing the whole tenor of our lives, I shall never know; for as seizing a silence in her feverish talk she bent towards me, seeking vainly for words while her colour leapt and paled, I heard a cry near me, and from behind one of the islands with which the Thames is studded a wherry shot forth, rowed by a drunken man. In a moment he was on us. All might yet have been well had not Nancy flung herself into another seat to escape the sudden onslaught, but she rose in panic and in a moment we were all three struggling in the water, and beneath us the weeds lay tangled in very death-traps.

Now the danger swept my mind clean of all other thoughts save that of my wife's preservation, and when I rose choking from the water my first idea was her safety. A few yards from me the fool who had wrought this folly, now

temporarily sobered, spluttered oaths; and just past him was Nan struggling and clinging to the upturned boat. "Tony!"—the ghost of her voice trembled on the water, and she strove to come to me. In a moment I was beside her, and at that moment my punishment began. "For myself, I—do—not—care—" she gasped, "but the other—" and her hands plucked at the life she carried beneath her heart. "For myself —I—do—not—care—" she who had been the very incarnation of warm, beautiful life turning indifferently to death as holding at least peace. Now the remembrance of her despairing speech gives another turn to the knife; but at the time I spoke impatiently in my terror, and my last words—God forgive me—were sharp.

I shouted for help, but the night was already on us, and there was no sign of any living soul along the banks; and when I strove to swim, the weeds, like long snakes, twisted round my legs, impeding my progress and snaring me the more I struggled, while Nan, unconscious, pressed heavily upon me. Then slowly, sickeningly, the drunken brute who had brought us to this pass began to drown. He had struck out towards the bank, and was making fair way, when he became entangled in the water-weeds, and

stopped, powerless to free his legs. It was awful to see him die, sucked slowly down by the quiet-flowing river, hardly a ripple on it to break its gleaming sheen. Overhead the white moon hung like a benediction, turning the great lily-cups to silver, and looking down remorselessly on the drowning man below. As he struggled he shrieked hideous blasphemies, and from them lapsed into a mad prayer; but he only sank the quicker for his struggles, as if Nature, intolerant of so foul a blot upon her still loveliness, was hurried to its oblivion by the frantic emphasis of his piteous plight. He sank as if into a quicksand; and a few seconds later the river gleamed unsullied, with not a fretted ripple to tell the tale. For all his ending I knew that we must strive to reach the shore; the boat showed sign of sinking, and I noted that it had sprung a slight leak where it had been struck. So, upholding Nan as best I could, I made another effort, this time with something more of success, and attained a few lengths towards the bank. We were in one of the widest parts of the river, and my heart sank as I realized the distance. "We will soon be safe," I lied intermittently to Nan; but she was unconscious, barred to pain, and I held only her

senseless body. I was but weakly, and every stroke seemed as if it must be my last; but I struggled on, and gradually the distance lessened, and with possibility of safety recurred something of the tumult into which Nan's words had cast me, and by some accursed trick of fortune I wondered for whom I was saving her. I thrust the thought from me and held her the tighter, but it would not be gainsaid, and at every stroke that brought us nearer land I heard the question louder. We were not four lengths from the shore, when out of the murky darkness stepped Cosmo, standing and stretching out triumphant hands—"an hallucination," they whisper, finger on lip, "mad." Ah, mad indeed! for as I looked I was knotted afresh by the water-weed, and Nan loosened from my arms, and this time I let her go—I let her go. . . .

Only a moment's madness, and then I was fighting wildly for freedom from the hellish liens that bound me, fighting vainly, while before me, just out of my reach, Nancy was sucked down to her death within a stone's-throw of safety. The gleaming waters closed over her head. My darling, it was an accident—an accident born of a passing madness—yet

in the glory of the skies another word sometimes lies blazoned. I hear it in the roar of a crowd; it is whispered in the silence of solitude; the winds fling it wide; in the breaking of the waves it is screamed to the shore. I cannot evade it; all the world knows what the river and I did between us, though to me men speak honeyed words, pretending that the waters did their foul work unaided. "It had taxed a strong man's strength," they say, seeking to comfort me with empty words—"you are but weakly," and the old hated look of pity steals over their faces; and I, for the moment, I love it, and wring gladness from the knowledge of the infirmity that has blasted my life. I did my best; what am I to save a life? No fault of mine, I cry to my dead; all man could do I did. There are none to give me the lie, and yet—I know myself for what I am—I know what I did when I pushed her away in that one mad moment when my brain was all a-fire and Granby stretched out willing hands to take my burden from me. When the shades thicken, and the river-mists rise, the gray ghosts of the river sob the truth; I hear it in strange lands proclaimed by alien tongues; it comes to me in the jocund tumult of the spring, when the world lies pranked out in

its fairest; I hear it in the falling flutter of the autumn leaves. The little children stare at me affrighted, and their elders pass me by uneasily. They know—they all know, though they will not speak of it, preferring their weary comedy; but the truth clamours ever in my ears, for who, though he cheat the whole world, shall salve his heart with belief in his own lies? Christ pity me! Once I wished her dead, and within the year she lay with the heavy mould upon her face, and her jangled requiem is for ever sounding. "*Such love, when lost, is lost to all eternity.*"

* * * * *

As I write, the ashes of the dead past quicken and glow, stinging my memory to over-keen remembrance, and by such pain impeding the telling of my tale. Fifty years have passed—fifty years of toil and suffering, holding many failures, yet rich in success and in the commendation of men; but of these things it is but the wraiths that haunt me in a phantasmagoria of misty shadows that ghost-like flit through my brain, leaving my pulses unstirred. But there are scenes branded into my very soul that live quick and fresh as though but a sun had set since their happening.

It is night, and I stand beside a grave newly carved in the earth; a curious crowd is surging in the churchyard, the yellow flicker of torches makes fantastic shapes of the heavy tombstones and uneven mounds that lie in their irregularity as though the dead slept but fitfully beneath; a great bat flaps heavily through the air, and from out the gloom of the woods the discordant note of a corn-crake jars the silence and fuses with the sobs of women; now and again whispered words of sympathy reach me, and I beat down the laugh in my throat. Did they but know! but they did not know. Only once in the lurid glare of a torch Ooterwint's eyes met mine, and I read knowledge of the truth in his stern gaze.

"*In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour but of Thee?*"

A wind woke suddenly, and the long grasses stirred and shivered on the graves as though voicing the plea of those that lay prisoned beneath—whispering—whispering to the indifferent skies and the silent stars. "*But of Thee, O Lord—but of Thee,*" and the priest droned on, "*Deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.*"

Perhaps, after all, madness was working in

my brain, for it seemed to me that Nan's voice cried aloud: "*Deliver me not—deliver me not*"—her voice was sharp with terror. I could not think that she was dead, and stretched out staying hands when they lowered the coffin, praying them desist from this monstrous wrong.

I remember that I was forcibly held back, and that a woman cried out pitifully; but I broke away from their grasp, and would have hurled myself into the grave had not Ooterwint held me in a grip of iron.

God! when the first earth rattled on her, was it I who shrieked, understanding finally what I had done? What did the voice say? "*Blessed are they that die in the Lord!*" I could not follow it. My mind was blurred to all understanding but of the black chasm at my feet, and of my love that lay within.

It was over at last, and they would have forced me to return with them, but I would not leave her lying there alone, and at last even Ooterwint tired, and left me alone with my dead. For long hours I prayed her send me some token of her presence, but the night slipped on, and never a sign came for all my crying, and at last, overcome with weariness, I slept.

When I awoke the stars had died, and the east was glinting with the glory of the coming day. As I stared stupidly, numbed with sleep, a great shaft of light leapt from it, a bird began to sing, and the world waked; but she—she did not wake.

* * * * *

The first days after the funeral lay heavily blurred in my memory. I remember only that Ooterwint rarely left me, and was for ever praying me return to my home, and that I could not tear myself away from the place where she lay.

It seemed to me, as I waited by the roughly-tossed earth that marked the new-made grave, that she must know of my presence, and in my madness I would cry to her deaf ears, beseeching her forgiveness, praying her have no fear in her loneliness—she lying there desolate with her unborn child, shut away from all the brightness that she had so loved.

At last, almost by force, Ooterwint took me home, and as we neared the end of our long journeying, the Nan I had left behind faded to the unsubstantial fancy of a wrecked brain, and almost I believed that she awaited me at home. It could not be that she was dead, and that the world bustled with its old cheerfulness; the

jovial tones of the driver and the clang of the horses' hoofs rang familiarly in my ears. Just so had it been when she sat by my side some two weeks past. It could not be that she was dead.

Ah me, the heart-break of that home-coming! I faced it alone, praying Ooterwint leave me to myself, which he did, unwillingly, begging me to suffer his presence, but I would none of him.

XIX

NOON of the next day I went to her private room where she had been used to write and work. I was drawn by a fascination that I was unable to resist to move among things personal to her, to stand where she had lately stood, to finger what her hands had lately touched.

When I opened the door I fell back, for all her occupations lay as she had left them in her hurry—a book half-opened tossed upon a table, a white tangle of work with a needle thrust in it and a thimble beside it—I knew what she had been stitching, and turned faint where I stood. Despite myself, my hands went out to it for love of her late contact, and as I moved it a bunch of keys went rattling to the ground. I picked them up mechanically, and as I did so noted that among the heavier keys hung the tiny gilded one of her escritoire.

It flashed across my mind, as I laid them

his breath, but I affected not to hear. Though I cannot keep from teasing him, there are times when he brings a smart to my eyes. He told me to-day of how a child had mocked him. 'Punchinello!' it had said, scoffing at his deformity. He told me the tale in the baldest mode, in bitter, sneering tones, yet for all his posing I heard the heart—break through the mock, and I—I—almost I am ashamed to write it—I kissed him. He looked so pitiful, and the indifference covered his pain with so thin a veneer.

"Methinks he liked it, for he tried to soften me to another kiss, telling me the story afresh with detail and a melancholy air; but I saw through his ruse—poor ingenuous Tony—and would not. He is such a baby for all his genius and tantrums. I cannot choose but tease him. 'The lads in the village call it after me,' he said, and sighed till the leaves overhead fluttered. Now the mother told me that five years ago a drunken man had done this thing, and that the other lads had set upon him and ducked him freely in the horsepond; but Tony looked at me unashamed, with head a trifle askew.

"'Punchinello they call me,' he moaned—

and waited. But I minded how ofttimes he had jeered at women and their free lips, and sprang away from him, praying him play his brave dance again. Then it was, 'Call me —Punchinello, and the smart will be gone from the word.' Never was there such a lad of whims and cranks, but pretty speeches are indeed a fresh departure. He was so keen set on it that I bargained with him—if he would fiddle afresh I would twist my mouth to the hideous word. To which he assented. Oh, what a dance! I could trip the whole day to its measure."

Her lust of life and movement glittered through the lines. Her rash phrase rang in my ears. "*Come weal or woe, how good it is to be alive*"—and still I read:—

"While we were without on the lawns the Lady Agatha arrived in her chaise, a wondrous dame with daubed cheeks but a most exquisite gown. It must be passing sweet to so rustle with every step, and to wear nodding plumes that wave with every motion of the head. Were I so gowned and feathered, I would be for ever whirling and bowing. Tony loved her not; in part, I fancy, because she goaded me to tears regarding my dear Harry, but more,

I trow, because she be a woman. To list to him one would think we were the devil's lures, leading only to grief and sin. I fled from my godmother, crying like a babe, and shortly Tony followed me to bid me go back; but we returned not, and spent a pleasant hour in chatting." Anthony looked at me not unkindly—methinks his hatred of women is somewhat superficial. I think—I do not know—I think I might train him to toleration of our sex. It seems a sad waste of his affections to spend it all on music, however beautiful. I should like a fragment, and most certainly he looked not unkindly at me!"

Swiftly I turned the page with shaking hand:—

"Anthony has returned to Town—I miss him terribly. Oft I wonder if he misses me. I doubt it, living in a cloud of dreams as he does. I wish——"

She prattled of my return for a few days: "Anthony comes to us for a brief stay—methinks he is anxious regarding the mother, who fails somewhat. I will wear my white taffeta, and he will stare at me with solemn eyes, and just when the pretty compliment should be ripe he will turn his back and break out about

the different schools of art. Tony is not gallant. How I hate that music! If it were not for that, he would notice me more seriously."

Then again a lapse, after which the pages were filled with the history of her brief stay in Town, and her regret that she never met me in her gay circle; then later a thanksgiving that I had been rescued from the conflagration of St. Mary's.

"Had he died, I could not have borne it," she wrote. "He regards me little; I—I love him."

Truly, sweetheart, your vengeance was great! On—on it went—the laying bare of a white soul.

"To-day the Viscount Lothair made me a handsome offer of his hand and heart. I declined both; not, I trust, discourteously, but I could scarce keep my countenance. Lady Agatha is furious. I go home to-morrow, and I shall see Anthony. They speak of him as of great promise, and I listen proudly. Only one more day and night, and I shall see him with mine own eyes. Though he regard me not, caring for nought but crotchets and quavers, he cannot help my loving him. Perhaps—perhaps . . ."

Again a long hiatus—then some few scrawled words telling of her great happiness when I prayed her be my wife.

"Surely I am fearful by reason of the greatness of my joy! Anthony—my dear, dear love . . ."

The fragmentary lines were almost illegible, scribbled carelessly, and often ceasing before the sentence was closed, as though the writer had known how vain a thing it was to attempt to express her joys in words. As I read I could see her writing, in gay impatience using a tedious page for lack of happier confidant. I saw her, too, with white face and dripping hair; yet I read, forcing myself further.

Of the first perfect months of our married life there was little written. Just a word telling she doubted such happiness could be. Then she wrote of Granby's advent, and how she desired to thank him in person, and I—although I felt the dead beside me—laughed with a strange mirth.

"To-day the hero who saved my Tony comes to us. I am keen to thank him for delivering my dear love from danger. Had he died—I cannot think of it . . ."

I turned the page.

"Cosmo Granby is no other than Jasper Ruthven. Why did he travel under an alias? What matter—to each his own affair! I would he looked not so boldly at me—my dear love is all a-fire. Yet when I would check Master Granby, I cannot. I remember he saved my darling's life, and perforce bear his broad compliments."

Here she drifted away to talk of other things, to anxious noting of my mother's failing health and fear that the snap of winter prove too strong for her, with now and again an irritated note of impatience at Granby, and a fond toleration of my mad jealousy. Further, she wrote:—

"My poor Anthony, it is a cruelty so to tease him, but I cannot for the life of me forbear. Master Granby has but to glance at me, and his great eyes glow and his lips tighten to a thin line. It is a wholesome discipline for him nathless—I remember this and check my desire to tell him that his little finger is more to me than ten thousand handsome blockheads of Granbys. My clever Anthony! It is the greatest pity that he has this crank in his brain touching the visitation with which God has afflicted him—it touches madness.

The mother told me to-day that it was Granby who mocked him as Punchinello when a child —a brutal act, but surely atoned for by his heroic saving of his life at St. Mary's. Tony is terribly unforgiving. No doubt the wound still gapes."

Here several days passed unmarked by entries, and when again she wrote it was in a graver vein.

"Anthony's moods try me terribly. It is indeed most curious that one so gifted should, in these matters, act as a very child. Still, as the dear God has so made him—perhaps, after all, he cannot act otherwise. If it were not so irritating, it would be intensely humorous. He has hardly eyes or ears even for his mother, whom he adores, but sits and glares at Master Granby and myself with murder in his face—my dear ridiculous love! I cannot but feel it would be well to let him glare unnoted, but I cannot bear to see him look unhappy. A few days past I happened to glance suddenly up and found his eyes fixed on me, and in them I saw a monstrous anguish, and as I looked he rose and went out of the room with bent head. There is a glass let into the further wall of the parlour, and as

he passed he raised his head as if involuntarily, and I saw him wince and cower before his own reflection—mine own dear silly Tony. He must be humoured. Adieu to Master Granby's pretty speeches. I will be cautious, and treat him with growing coldness, and he will no doubt accept the hint.

"Tony has not glowered so furiously for the last day or so, as I have striven to foist Master Granby on to Cecily, but the position is still rich in discomfort. Now Cosmo is irritated, and not tardy in showing it, and Reuben too looks not over-charmed. Still I care not. Anthony looks happier and is in a more gracious mood, and every day nears us to Cosmo's departure."

Now there came a blank space; and when again she wrote, the pages were blistered with the dropping of hot tears.

"The mother is dead. I can hardly realize it, and miss her every hour. God never made a better woman. It was terrible to see her die, yet we could not wish the struggle prolonged, so acute was her agony, and somehow it seemed to me not all physical, but as if some trouble lay on her mind, and she would have spoke it before she died. It was piteous to

see her fighting her weakness, and staring at Tony with eyes all alive with meaning, yet unable to articulate. Some word she spoke, and he answered in rapid response, as though he had known what she would say; but he had signed to Cecily and me to stand apart, so I know not what she whispered. I would she had not died with that terrible look of unrest on her face—even death failed to iron out the marks.

"Granby has left us, thank God, and gone to his home: it is too near, still yet it is something to have him away. He spoke when he left us of soon coaching to Town—I pray he may do it. Temporarily my mind was wiped clear, by the sad fortune that has befallen us, of the miserable hour that heralded it. My heart flutters when I think of it. I had not thought, for all Anthony's airs, that the mischief rankled so deep. The day she died Granby had gone out walking, and in his absence Anthony took it upon himself to speak to me regarding his attitude towards me. I am not over-placid as to temper, and Anthony is a very firebrand, so in five minutes we had the makings of a very pretty quarrel. He indeed irritated me so by his way of speaking

—I might have been a damsel of ten years—that I wept with rage, after which all was well. I will remember it in future, 'Women's weapons water-drops,' and most excellent weapons too. I was just preparing to forgive him—it seemed wiser not to rush at this desirable end too soon; my Tony must learn something of manners—when the door opened, and Granby strode in with a bunch of violets in his hand. Now for all my good resolutions I could not keep from teasing my love a trifle, and I smiled with a touch of extra sweetness at Cosmo as he moved towards me. He is never tardy in his advances, and he marched up to me and slipped the flowers in my girdle. At this moment I glanced at Tony to mark how he took the lesson. Ouf—never again! He may behave as he will for the future, I instruct him no more. He looked a very devil, his face twitching and his body bent forward as though for a spring. I do not know what would have happened had not at this moment a cry sounded from above which sent me flying up the stairs, followed on my heels by him, to find the mother in extremity. I would he had not this mania. When we were first betrothed, the mother gave me a word of

warning regarding it, saying that it was due in great part to his affliction, which makes him feel that other men must assuredly pass him on the road to the goal of any woman's love. I was a brute to tease him. Nevermore!"

Avid to learn, I yet could hardly turn the leaves for terror of the coming knowledge. It was as though her lips, sealed in life, now spoke from the grave. Had I wronged her, after all? Yet I had seen her in his arms, his kisses on her face: were there words in all the world that could spell in that picture a different story to the one I had read? Of a spell of time there was no word; and when again she wrote, the shadow of her trouble was looming large.

"I am sorely troubled; I know not where to turn. To-day, when walking at some distance from home, I was waylaid by Granby. He flung himself from his horse and kissed me where I stood; his mouth burns me now. In my passion I struck him sharply on the cheek. 'I am no light o' love,' I said, scarce able to speak for fury and fear. Had Tony chanced to pass—I dare not think of it. His face grew very evil. 'No,' he sneered; 'stranger things have been. The wise doctors have it that his

ancestors live in each man—and woman. Boast not too soon, Mistress Nancy!' and then in his anger he burst out with a filthy tale—lies—lies—lies. Yet I grow hot when I write it. He said that my mother was a woman of the streets, picked up by Harry for love of her perfect face. 'He had always a nice taste in women,' he grinned, 'but she was fairer than the last,—indeed, beat the record,—and there were some winsome women among them, unless rumour lies with more than a thousand tongues.'

"'You lie,' I said, forcing the words with difficulty, for my brain seemed numbed as if from a great blow; 'Harry had never wedded such a woman.'

"Here he burst into a roar of laughter. 'Harry Dallas wedded! Dallas a Benedict! Though he loved you above all things, he would never let you call him father—too domestic! If he heard that, he would laugh for all the fires of hell.' He spoke in the heat of his wrath, and as it cooled, he looked somewhat ashamed. 'There, think no more of it,' he said; 'why should we not be friends?' and essayed to touch my hand, but I shuddered away from him and would not.

"'You lie—you lie!' I cried again. Long had I struggled to say it, but the words seemed frozen on my lips. And having voiced it I was afraid and left him, while he, having some grain of compassion, forbore to follow."

* * * * *

The book slipped from my hand, and I looked through the windows at the brilliant world without. A great creeper that covered the house, tossed by a passing breeze, flung a branch across the lattice; the leaves painted with their dying scarlet flush hung as in brilliant defiance of the death that menaced them. Silently they echoed *Morturi te Salutant*; the conceit pleased me. They had reddened early this year, I reflected, for it was but the end of August. External things laid hold on me. Other trifles I noted—a worn patch on the tapestry, a picture hanging terribly askew. I rose and set it right.

It hung in line at last, and then I turned and saw her words lying on the floor; but I did not move, for from where I stood the lines were but as a faint blur, and I dared not advance lest I should read further.

The lattice was not closed; the air stirred the pages till it seemed as though they were

informed with life and beckoned to me in mute appeal. I read again:

"Fool that I was to hearken to such slander of the dead. Here, safe at home, I sit and laugh at the base malice that stimulated his sluggish imagination to such mean revenge. I would tell Tony if it were not for his temper. I would do better to coax him to be civil to Master Granby, not that I care what he may say; yet at times—how shall I put it? I am indifferent and anxious all in a breath. If he were to speak to Anthony—and he is malicious enough for aught—Jesus mercy!

"I received a letter from Granby to-day, praying my pardon, and begging me receive him when he comes in person to offer his apologies. Never will I receive him, the base hound! How dare he ask me? I will speak to Anthony. No, I dare not. Indeed, had I the courage, I lack the heart. He is working very hard at an oratorio, and if it were not for the shadow of our late loss he would be as happy as these spring days are gay. Nature is in her best mood; the world is freshly painted to meet the wear and tear of the new year; the skies are as great seas of blue, all flecked with white, like the fretted edges of breaking waves,

and everywhere the sap seems stirring. We enjoy to the uttermost these fair days—my Tony and I. I would I could wipe from my mind the memory of Cosmo Granby's brutal insult. It was but idle fire and fury, yet it haunts me.

"He has again sent me a letter by his servant. Again he threatens to come in person if I will not meet him without. In his epistle he tells me that he has given the strictest injunctions that it be given straight into mine own hands; and a foolish maid, of new service, failing to hap on me instantly, left it lying in the vestibule, where Tony chanced on it and brought it to me. At the time I could barely speak, my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth; but by the time we met at our mid-day meal I had mastered myself, and brought it out from my pocket and read him a page or two in which Granby prattled of common gossip. Excellently well I acted, talking and laughing. My strength is more than I thought. He suspects nothing; but ah, how he hates him! If I were not so troubled, I could smile at the remembrance of the crockery smashing on the floor when I minded him that Granby had saved his life. At the time my laughter

would not be checked; even Anthony was infected to such measure as wrung from him the shadow of a smile. Granby writes that if I will meet him in Taunton woods, he will show me proofs incontestable of the truth of his foul tale. I will not go; and yet—Taunton woods is five miles as the crow flies, a generous seven as we trudge it. Anthony would never know, and I should find out once and for all on what fool's evidence Granby has manufactured this foul lie."

My hands shook when I would have turned the leaves; the pages seemed glued together. Did I pray the record break off short, and the next leaf prove blank? But there was more to come.

"It is true—true! O God, what shall I do? If Anthony come to know! I went to the woods and met him. At first he would have ignored the subject and only prayed my pardon, begging me again receive him at my house. But when I told him that never again should he stand under roof of mine he fell to the old evil laugh, and brought from his pocket a packet of letters, old, yellowed with years, written by Harry to an uncle of Granby's. Oh, shame—shame! Till this day I was

ignorant of the meaning of the word, now I cannot hold my head erect. If Anthony come to know!" The phrase beat as a pulse through the history of her pain.

With monstrous difficulty I deciphered the swerving, blotted lines, piecing together the pathetic incoherent words, till the story of her undoing lay clear before me.

"In these letters he tells of having found the loveliest maid wandering in the streets of Florence, and of having taken her to his house. 'It is good,' he writes, 'to have a woman about me again; when one has grown habituated to them, it is exceeding dreary without the frou-frou of a skirt, and this one is passing lovely, fairer than Netta Lascelles, and of more wit than my little Spanish love.' He described her beauty minutely, with an exact observance that I cannot bring myself to write. It could not be my Harry who wrote so obscenely. Christ save me from madness! He is writing to an old friend, and is very free; my face burned as I read. I opened another letter, a year later. 'My beauty has tired of me, but left me a tribute. Impossible though it sounds, I am fond of the squawking brat; it has its mother's eyes and is of her sex. Poor little

devil, it shall have a chance! I wrote to-day to the Lady Agatha, my sister-in-law, to beg her stand godparent, by proxy; she had always a soft place in her heart for scapegrace Harry. My relatives think I have made a great match. Ho, ho! Laugh with me, old friend. I dare not write to the Dallas tribe, though my brother be dead. We split, he and I, when I tired of Netta Lascelles.'

"Another letter he showed me. 'I came to hear of these letters,' he said, with a touch of shame, 'when through an affair it was desirable that I should leave England for a time. My uncle wrote to Dallas—here is the letter you should have read first—the others followed.'

"'I am sorry to hear that your nephew is in trouble; let him come and visit me under an alias. Things will blow over, and I will take heed to his welfare while he is in gay Florence.'

"What shall I do? What shall I do? The world seems rocking. I cannot doubt him longer. Incontrovertibly he speaks the truth. When I had finished the letters and stood silent, unable to move, he took me in his arms and kissed me. I made no resistance. What am I? O God, if Tony come to know!

"I returned home safely. Tony was in a fantastic mood, he insisted on my reading a foolish allegory, telling of a maid and a lily. It seemed to me that he thrust, under cover of this tale of hidden foulness, a hint at me. But that cannot be. I am dazed with trouble, yet I managed to match his humour, and belittleing his choice, read him some gay verses that I picked at random from out a volume lying by his side."

Again a space in the narrative of events. When she wrote again it was as if she had passed through some severe crisis, and that danger had nerved her wits.

"I must coax those letters from him. To me my mother wit! Despair helped no man yet, and in truth Granby is but a fool—such part of him as is not a brute. Appeals to his compassion are but waste of breath. Suppose I feign the love he demands; perhaps, being satisfied, he will tire of me and quit this place."

The ignorance matched the innocence. I could not choose but smile; my sorrow and my anger seemed things afar. I burned to read faster, but oft-times the paper was blurred to such extent as frayed my patience to rags. Strangely cool and calm I felt; the pages held

me, and it seemed that other eyes than mine traversed the lines, marching in time with my reading, lingering where I lingered, hurrying where I made speed.

"He bade me meet him to-night; I was late returning. Tony looked strangely at me, and in my terror I reproached him for baseless suspicions. Yet he had not accused me. Fool—Fool—Fool!

"A little more and I go mad. Cosmo is ever in our house. My self-control is slipping from me; to-day I almost screamed for a passing sound. I cannot think what ails me. I am beset with fears and hopes. Is it because a new life stirs within me? Or does a sick fancy, born of distress, mock me? God help me, I am with child. I had thought to be so glad, and now I scarcely dare inform Tony. He looks at me curiously, and there is a lurking fury in his face that frightens me. But he can know nothing; I am full of fancies. Yet surely it was no fancy when he flung me from him to-night when I would have kissed him. I am lonely—very lonely; still I hope. He knows nothing; he meets Cosmo as though he were his dear friend. I am afraid."

The room seemed strangely cold, yet without

the world was lapped in a flood of glaring sunshine, and the creeper blazed as though drenched with blood.

"He knows, and all my endeavour is for naught. To-day I told him of our coming child—how long I have dreamed of this hour—and he looked coldly at me. 'Have you no shame?' he said, and no word more."

For the life of me I could not resist looking over my shoulder, but there was no one there. I knew she would return, and read on:—

"I have striven to tell him but he will not hear, and I am afraid—afraid. If the mother were alive she would help me. I write it dreading no denial, for she is dead. In truth, she would have loathed me. She had but one word for sinning women and the fruit of their love. I am ill, and terribly afraid. Anthony regards me as though I were a foul fester, and a little while ago we were lovers still. I *must* tell him—I must. But he and Granby will quarrel, and what will the end hold?"

Again I was aware of the presence behind me; her breath was on my neck, the perfume of her hair floated in the air as she leant over

my shoulder with eager eyes that scanned the page. I dare not turn for fear of affrighting her; but I spoke in the silence, anxious to reassure her. "Dear, I understand," I said, for she was troubled I knew that in her hurry and fever she had omitted something of moment.

"To-day Cosmo——"

I filled the blank to the fulness of the insult that had been too black for her to trace, and remembered with a great joy that Granby lay under no protecting earth.

"I have missed another chance of making my confession, but the clouds are lifting. Tony does not know, but he has seen us together—now all is explained. This evening we sat together in the shadows of the dying day, and for all my endeavours my weakness overpowered me. I felt that I could suffer my life no more. Only half a word I said to him, but he met me as though my cry had unsealed his lips, and in a great flood of passionate words that tripped each other up he told me of what he had seen; how he had watched our meetings and seen Granby take me in his arms. Then the old cry of his deformity. He should never have wedded me, and for all his anger his voice broke suddenly and he sobbed some vague

word of having undone my life. Only he had believed I loved him. O God! for all his genius was there ever such a fool? Now—now in this most difficult hour, maddened as I am by trouble, I could shake Tony as a froward child for his foolishness. Of course, appearances stand terribly against me; but what are appearances? An Tony swore to me with his dying breath that he loved me not, I should not believe him, but should make excuses for his folly in his dying as I do now for his folly in his living. Who knows, his love may survive even this ordeal. To hearken to him, a stranger would think that we were wedded in the dark, and that I first saw his crooked back after our marriage was sealed and we were linked together for better, for worse, for all our days. My spirits are lighter, though I fled away from him in tears, fearing every minute I should out with the truth. I cannot bear to be lowered in my love's eyes. How tell him? No longer will I remain under that devil's thumb! I would I had told Tony at first; my temporising has availed me nothing; and after the other day—I blush in the dark when I think of it. Yet, to be just, what could I expect? Assuredly if I do not tell him Cosmo will. 'Your Lilli-

putian has a proud spirit,' he crowed lately at me. 'I broke it once when a child, but it has mended bravely, and is stiffer than of yore; it needs my care again.'

"The child is father to the man. The devil who so torments me has changed in no whit from the coward who jeered at my poor love's deformity. I hate him, but all my hate is powerless to wreak him the tiniest evil. What shall I say to Tony—how begin? After all, it is not my fault; but he is so proud, so sensitive. I can almost find it in my heart to rejoice that the mother is no more; she would die of the shame. What will Cecily say? She is shortly to be wedded, and will drift out of our lives; perchance, she will never know—it matters not. Suppose Anthony scorn me. Methinks he would try to hide it, for he has a generous heart and wounds no one willingly. But I should discover it.

"I hope much from this new life, which I pray may bind our two more firmly together. Tony will forgive it for the child's sake. If only I were not such a coward! I *cannot* tell him. I know not how to word it. It sounds worse outspoken than dimly sketched in the thoughts. It is terrible to be degraded in the

eyes of those we love. I will not tell him. No, coward that I am, whatever my story cost me I must out with it."

I put my hand behind me seeking her, but my fingers closed on space. Still I knew she was there; her gown rustled as she stepped back a pace and eluded me.

"Indubitably the clouds are lifting; almost—almost I discern a finger of blue. Ooterwint has been here in reference to the appointment of organist at the Abbey; it is a big plum, and many hungry mouths are open to receive it when it drops. He thinks Tony has a good chance, but he must haste to town. He is, indeed, very young, but Purcell was younger It is a long journey, and we start as soon as possible. Adieu, Master Granby, for the present. When we return"—surely a sob came from behind my chair, but I could not look—"Tony will know all—all—*all*, and you may do your worst. Perhaps, after all, he will not be so sorely angered as I feared. All this time I have fretted myself for naught, for he obviously knows nothing, and is only jealous—this time, I must admit, with reason. I have been a fool, so has Tony. If I saw him kissing another maid in the woods, straightway would I inquire

the reason, not sit, as is apparently the mode of Tony, eating my heart out at a little distance, and then, when some three months and two weeks have passed, make a flare. I would that the spring-tide was breaking, and that the autumn and dark winter lay behind. I should have a tiny advocate then to help my cause; but I must be brave. This is but August, and it has still two weeks to run. I have a feeling that all will yet be well, and this time but a hideous nightmare of which we shall never speak.

"We coach to town to-morrow. Anthony is in a fearful temper, all glares and scowls, and mostly spends his hours tramping the lanes. I am beset with a fancy that he seeks Cosmo Granby. To God we were away! Granby will not think it worth his while to follow us for so short a space of time, and before we return he will be powerless to harm me. How proud I shall be if fortune favours Tony. My mind swings between his possible success and my trouble.

"It is a terrible thing to say to him, but after all not so bad as what he suspects, and it is not my fault. (Now I hardly believe it of Harry, I love him still.) I could see he

believed nothing of my denial. Poor Tony! I wonder Granby is still alive. Still, what he suspects is false, and so easier to bear. But the truth, the hideous truth, and he fastidious, sensitive to a fault. When I think of how I welcomed Granby, seeing in him the means by which my happiness had been preserved to me, and how foul he has proved himself, I could tear out the tongue that greeted him. I hate him — hate him. If aught give me courage it will be that I outwit his malice. Oft I sit and seem to hear him pouring out his tale to Tony, all adorned with gibes and sneers.

"What avails this waste of words? But it relieves my heart. Without these pages methinks I had gone mad. Here I register my vow. Before we turn our backs on town, Tony shall know all. No care can be worse than this. I am very weary, and I have none in whom to rest. Between my love and I stands a great wall; but it will not be for much longer, and Tony and I have yet many fair years before us in which to atone for this sad waste of months."

* * * *

When I turned and would have kissed her, and with sweet words made all well again, there

was only space, and Cosmo's grinning face mouthing at me from out a corner. At last! I remember a great exultation leaping in my veins, a wild rush at the phantom, and the crash as my head met the wall. There was a great hurry of people, and men held me, saying I was mad; and then a brief struggle, after which for many days I knew nothing, not even that my love was dead, but dreamed in my delirium that she and I went drifting, drifting down an eternal river, talking sweet foolishness one to the other, and that suddenly the waters rose and engulfed us, and Nancy cried "the other"; but I would not hear, and still she struggled. And a great beast, with the face of Cosmo, who lay upon the banks doubled with laughter, gaily shrieked, "The courageous Lilliputian!" And there was no more water, only land; and a great crowd collected round a newly-dug grave. The priest had the face of Granby, and he seized the coffin and flung it in the gloomy hole, and I knew that Nan was within and would have stayed him. "*Deliver me not into the bitter pains of eternal death*"; her voice was thick with sobs and terror, but they held me back, and now it is too late.

XX

YEAR in, year out, I sought Cosmo Granby and was for ever baffled, although there were times when success seemed so near that I paused on its threshold and whispered to my dead—so she should sleep the easier—that soon she would be avenged. Only in this long probation I learned patience, and for all the sickening failure of the year played no mad juggle with my desire or rashly strove to wrest it from the hand of Fate, but grew ever more stealthy and unhurried, knowing that he who would win must learn to fold his hands and wait.

I had followed him over weary continents, but always it seemed as though some supernatural power protected him, and though oft-times he had but a few minutes start of me, still he kept that start, and so we wandered, pursuer and pursued, through the length and breadth of Europe.

Once he was so near that I could have sobbed for disappointment when, as ever, he eluded me.

One Easter-tide we kneeled together in St. Peter's at Rome, but in the great multitude I saw him not till the service was almost closed. The Host was raised high and the crowds abased themselves in adoration; lower, lower bent the heads of the people in the silence; still, individually, when the eyes travelled over the closely-packed masses they seemed to swerve and sway as though stirred by a silent wind. Through the incense a bell sounded, telling of the Presence, and in the monstrous tension of the moment a woman's voice smote sharply through the air. Startled, I lifted my eyes and met Cosmo's gaze rivetted on me in a stare of terror. I smiled back on him—long had I waited for this hour—and tried to make my way through the serried ranks of worshippers that hemmed me in. He too rose and carved his way out towards the great doors, indifferent as I to the shocked stares and muttered execrations that followed us. But when I reached the exit he was gone, and though I searched Rome, tramping the streets all day and half the night till my limbs failed me and I could do no more for very weariness, my search availed me nothing.

When next I heard of him he was in Paris, and

thither I went, but too late. It was a year since my darling was done to death, and I was starving for my vengeance, but seemed no nearer to it than in the first weeks.

Then one day, when hope was burning very low, God heard.

In despair I had returned to London and was striving to stun remembrance with work. Slowly the magic of my Art soothed me, and there were times when my sorrow lifted for a space and I was almost happy. But these were brief interludes succeeded by hours the blacker for the respite.

At this date an infectious fever was raging in town, and men were falling like flies. It was a fearful time; for all went in terror of their neighbours, regarding even their nearest and dearest with suspicion, and there was hardly a house in which death had not levied tribute.

One morning I woke, conscious of a curious heaviness in my limbs and a racing pulse. They were portents of the terror that was thinning the streets, and for the moment I was seized with a great fear that death might balk me of my desire. But as the day advanced my strength returned to me in measure, and cursing myself for a weak fool I dragged myself from my bed, and

pricked by a renewal of the old energy, again took up my search. My limbs ached piteously, almost refusing their office, but I was impelled by a foreign force that urged me to renewed effort as often as I lagged. Reasonless though it was, it seemed to me that I heard a voice murmuring courage, and that before the night fell I should have attained my end.

The afternoon crept on, the gray shadows began to haze the world, and I had seen nothing.

Then suddenly my heart leaped into my mouth, for walking down the Mall, individualized from the passers-by on account of his great height and heroic proportions, I imagined I recognized Granby.

My futile stalking had taught me something of strategy, and I shadowed the man carefully, taking prodigious precautions against his sighting me, and fingering at whiles the stiletto I always carried—I had learned the habit in Italy, and it clung to me. He walked slowly, often tarrying to exchange a greeting with an acquaintance, and men looked after him with a smile. As I gained on him a trifle I noticed that he was much the worse for wine, and staggered heavily in his gait. At last he left the frequented parts and diverged into a side

street. I followed him with difficulty, striving to knit my wits together as I went, for a recrudescence of the morning's symptoms held me. My heart leaped and halted in great bounds, as though it would burst my ribs; I burned and froze alternately, while a great nausea overwhelmed me. At last mine enemy hurried into a low coffee-house, and I lingered without a moment, struggling to master my excitement. I was about to enter when the man I had followed hurriedly re-issued from the entrance and I found my eyes had played me false—it was not Granby.

Something had apparently sobered him, for he looked scared to death, and went flying up the street as though an enemy were at his heels. His likeness to my quarry was marvellous, but in my passionate disappointment I paid little heed to the curious resemblance and cursed my easy gullibility. Now the zest of the chase was over, and I again found my revenge resolved into a vain mirage, my sickness overwhelmed me with fresh violence.

Knowing the terror of infection that reigned I doubted it being worth my while to seek refuge in a public resort, and so at first made no endeavour to enter the coffee-house. But the

darkness was increasing rapidly, and my limbs failed me when I strove to push on, and thinking that in common charity they would at least seek me a hackney-coach, I pushed open the door and entered.

Commonly full of chattering gossips, the place was now deserted but for two servants, one of whom as I entered approached me with mouth all agape. "Sir," he began, but the other stopped him, bidding him hold his peace, and turning towards me asked what I wanted.

When I replied that a private room would best suit my need, he pointed up the stairs and mumbled directions that I did not catch, but made no offer of practical guidance. I was too glad to get a refuge to resent his incivility, and stumbled up the flights with swimming head and trembling knees. "Room number five!" he yelled at me as I reached the top, and I stood in a darkness that mocked the pale gleam of the lantern he had thrust into my hand. Four—two—the numbers ran irregularly, printed in confusing hieroglyphics that rendered their value nil from a utilitarian point of view. I staggered on till I came to what I imagined to represent a five, and pushed forward the door with a sigh of thankfulness.

By careful generalling of the flickering light I discerned that the room was untenanted and marshalled to a severe and comfortless order. The bed, pushed up against the wall, was covered with a white sheet, the table was bare of all necessaries, and a broken blind flapped restlessly against the window. Still there was at least quiet and peace, and flinging the door to behind me, I staggered to the bed, my one thought a pillow on which to lay my head.

The lantern I had dropped at the other end of the room, and only the faintest flare glimmered upon the bed, on which the shadow of the blind swept forwards and backwards, making fantastic arabesques of light and shade.

For all the shifting shades it seemed to me as I approached the bed that something lay beneath the stretched linen, and I lifted the sheet.

A dead man lay there with face turned to the wall and spread arms flung wide, as if in one last despairing fight for breath.

At this moment my first feeling was one of anger that I should find myself thus cheated of my bed; my voice was weak as an infant's when I tried to call for help, my strength was ebbing fast. Hardly could I drag the corpse

from the bed of which it stood no longer in need, and for which I so craved. The man was obviously but lately dead, the rigour of death was hardly on him, and as I dragged him in futile weakness his head fell to the side, and his eyes mad, tortured with a terror written in them that mocked life in its quick intensity, met mine. O God! O God! Death had cheated me. With his staring eyes and dropped jaw it was as though Granby mocked me from beyond the grave as he had mocked me in life that, as ever, I was impotent to harm him.

For the moment my strength returned, and remembering my stiletto, with beast-like fury I hacked and cut the mouth that had so fouled my darling and the eyes that had gloated on her beauty, and with each stab I minded look and word of hers. "O God!" she had cried, "if Anthony come to know!"

I laughed and wept as I worked—so much for her—so much for the unborn life—so much for me. They were heavy items and swelled to a handsome bill—what say you, Granby? It was good work well done, but I cried to think that there could come no crimson tide to mark the hour. The fever fired me, bringing mocking voices and strange faces in its train. Dead

Cosmo grinned at me with the mouth I had so deftly widened, and on his slit lips hovered "Punchinello," but his eyes were gone, and I was penitent, regretting my hastiness. That stare of terror had been balm to me—perhaps after all he paid the bill. What did he see when he lay untended, slowly a-dying to print an agony that scorned death's effacements? What did he see? Perhaps only a girl with a face like a flower and a voice that matched running water. Water! Water!

In my delirium I had dreamed of a great flood, and as I worked lovingly, gardening his face and tasting the moment to its fullest savour, a great river poured into the room from behind that flapping blind, and on it, undrowned, was borne my sweetheart laughing—laughing as she was swept past us; but in her hands she carried a dead child, and her face was white and wild with pain. The walls of the room faded away, and the great river in monstrous rolling waves rushed to its goal—a grave. On its edge she danced and flung wild kisses, and Granby suddenly appeared and would have taken her in his arms, but she flung herself back with a great cry and went head-down into the grave. And Cosmo shovelled earth upon

her—such heavy earth and she so small—and when I prayed him not, he mocked me in his great strength. The scene changed—I was back in God's acre by the river. . . . Darling, listen, you have slept long enough. The east burns red and the world is stirring from its sleep. . . . She will not hear. . . . A bird is carolling. . . . But she is deaf and still sleeps for all a man's mad crying. Mad! mad! They shall not part us. Who says "*Mad*"? "This fever sends the bravest brains reeling," says another. Oh, foolish words they speak! "Sir, I am not mad." Is that my voice? It screams like a frightened woman's pipe. "No, no," they whisper soothingly, and part us, though I cling to him so lovingly—I cannot bear to leave my work half done. The wrong room? The wrong room—if so it be, the finger of God guided me. I will not let him go; but they are the stronger; so we part, Master Granby, till we meet again in Hell. "Watch for me, for I shall surely come," I whispered where his ears had been; but they dragged me away with their foolish cry of "mad," and flung the sheet again over the thing on the bed.

*   *   *   *

For one long year my brain was numbed to

all things, and I moved among men as a ghost —among them, not of them—with difficulty grasping the meaning of their commonest phrases and acts, and indifferent to the curious glances cast askance at me, indifferent when with pursed lips and nodding heads they called me mad; indifferent when Reuben, weeping, brought me tidings that my sister bade fair to slip away in the throes of her travail; indifferent when the scale turned in her favour and he sang aloud for joy hanging over the little life that had threatened to cost so dear. These things touched me not; what had I to do with hope or despair? But in my mind there lay, I knew, a covered place, and sometimes, as I grew stronger and my memory strengthened, it became more and more difficult to ignore it.

At last it was no longer possible, and the ghosts of my past clamoured round me and would no more be silenced, and I understood why men looked queerly at me.

Now, as once before, my music saved me, and I travelled and studied, flinging myself into my work with the energy of despair lest that little word which men mixed so freely with talk of me, come to be true, and I indeed go mad. Striving, striving, always striving to forget

the years fled after one another, my youth, my strength passed, and I grew old and white; but I had not forgotten, although my ceaseless endeavour, that filled every hour with work, and left no nook or cranny in which thought could creep, kept my madness at bay. Success came to me, more than I had ever sought or dreamed; success that outstripped the furthest length of the ambitious programme of my childhood; success that frightened me, foreseeing as I did a time when all goals attained and the zest of endeavour past I should be left the prey of my memories. Yet never have I lost the sense of detachment with life, or shaken myself free of a feeling that in truth my life ended some fifty years ago, and that what has since passed is but a string of dry events, episodes and incidents in which I have played an automatic part, even to an ugly trick played on a dead face. To men I live; to myself I died one fair day in a long past summer; died, while the world lay without a painted picture of delight, and a trailing creeper flung scarlet tendrils across the open lattice; died while my fingers turned the pages of a girl's foolish tragedy. Heart of my heart! is it not the truth? What have the years held but a great emptiness for all the

seeming flare and flash, and it has availed nothing to its end. For I have not forgotten, neither seemingly have you, my darling, though you are over chary of your presence. Dear, the days and nights outvie each other in length —I am very desolate—and you come but rarely. Hush, what am I writing?—vapouring wildly as ever when I should write carefully, nor give men chance to scoff or call me mad. My biographer would hold his shaking sides did his eyes fall on this poor supplement to his grand volume. He brought it to me half finished, that I might correct the dates and lend verisimilitude to his graceful legends. Here I read what formed my staple food—there what style I favoured in the fashion of my coat—of a falling off in my work, of a stupendous recovery. A good biographer, how cleverly he writes, lending, as is the way of biographers, momentousness to nothings, and deep meaning to veriest platitudes. No doubt it will present a fair appearance when, handsomely bound, with his patter lying in generously margined pages, it goes forth to kind readers. I have seen other volumes and wondered at the poverty of the lives described; perhaps they also had a supplement by the subject that held the gist.

Fool that I am (as my dear one wrote) even now with the end of my—shall I say supplement?—so near, I cannot keep in line, but must needs rush on only to slink back. Why do I drivel of her presence? She is dead—lying among thousands such with a green grass above her that speaks by its luxuriance of ugly things below; not far from her flows the river, the perfect flowing river that smiles so sweetly, yet beneath which lie the green weeds waiting—only waiting—for their prey.

Perhaps, as the generous majority has it, my brain began to fail again. It matters not the reason. Suffice it to say that five years ago, as I sat in my rooms at Bruxelles watching the gay tide of foreign life slip past, a great desire to re-visit the home that I had not seen for so many years came over me; it was an irresistible impulse that refused to be gainsaid, and I, knowing well that I did foolishly to rend open wounds so lightly healed, yet obeyed it.

I came home in the chill of the early spring, and walked again in the old paths where I had so often wandered with my love. The chill bands of the winter tide still held the world; the sap of new life stirred but weakly in the budding branches. Though the days were

drear and desolate, with but scant promise of the coming glory, I could not withstand the charm that held me.

Down that long path, bordered by brown earth, tortured to fantastic pattern, all starred by breaking crocuses, she had rushed with quick, light steps. As I stared with drenched eyes at the straight stems crowned with gay cups of colour, I minded how she had loved these bright heralds of spring. Nan! Nan!

On the bare lawns she had oft-times wandered, walking pensively on their gay summer carpet, pulling apart poor daisies. Once on the tender sward that cheated foot-falls, I had followed her unperceived. "*Il m'aime*," she had been muttering; "*il m'aime, un peu, beaucoup, passionément, pas du tout.*" The gold heart, bereft of petals, had been flung angrily over her shoulders and struck me in the face. Dost mind, sweetheart?

Within it was worse, for the shallow stairs still held the clatter of her high-heeled shoes, and the passages were haunted by the rustle of her gown. In that great chair she had sat when first I saw her; there we had quarrelled, and here we had made our peace again. My coming meant the agony of a resurrection; yet for

all the pain I could not tear myself away, and lived on in the old house till spring had come and gone and the earth lay brown and burned under a summer blaze of sun.

One afternoon I wrote at my desk as was my habit; but strive as I might I could not nail my attention to my work. Against the present, the might-have-been lay pitilessly contrasted. I was too old to fight the unequal contest with memory, but gave myself up to dreams. Now, whenever my wits refused to work, I let myself go, and my imagination ran riot, picturing the past, revelling with exquisite torture in what the present might have held.

The long years had wrought no change; from where I sat I could see the rise of ground where she had danced that summer day; the glory of the gorse lay in wide yellow sheets, the shadows wavered on the lawns.

Moved by a desire to live again, as much as lay in my power, that scene of long ago, I went without into the garden taking my violin to play the music to which my darling had danced in the far past. The notes broke through the air, and as I played I saw—as there is a God above us—I saw my dead love dancing, her red skirts flying wide, the twinkle

of the shoe-buckles flashing silverly on her feet that moved gaily to the rhythm of the time. As clearly as I perceive this white paper and its wavering lines, I saw my Nan, and as I looked it seemed to me her lips stirred, and with the clash of the closing phrase her voice came to me. "Bravo! Bravo! Punchinello!" she cried, and then was gone.

They say I am mad—but I am not mad. I saw her then, I have often seen her since, and my sorrow lies the lighter. Would she come had she not forgiven me? I cannot think it. *Such love when lost is lost to all eternity.* We know better—she and I.

Yet one great flaw mars this joy. The dead are held to come in shadowy lights when the world lies hushed, creeping through the mists of twilight or when night veils the earth. But my love comes only to me when the sun blazes high and the world lies in the full glare of the summertide—one little space in the year. I am happy then, but for long long months I watch desolate and she comes not, neither at any time is she near me, and if I would approach her she is gone. Still I see her and I hear her voice, and for my love of these things I am afraid to die; lest I know them no more.

What to me is Heaven or Hell? I live only for the hour when I see you dancing, my pretty Nan, with the gilded slopes behind you; dancing on the dappled lawns while flickering shadows make a moving mosaic beneath your feet, and the winds ruffle your curls, dancing, dancing till you can dance no more and you fling a kiss to me. "Bravo!" you cry. I hear the tinkle of your laughter. "Bravo! Bravo!" the gay notes of your voice leap the long years and make music in my brain, "Bravo! Bravo! Punchinello!"

FINIS.

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